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SAVITRICHARANAND

COSMOGONY IN INDIAN THOUGHT

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# COSMOGONY

*In*  
INDIAN THOUGHT

Sampūrṇānand



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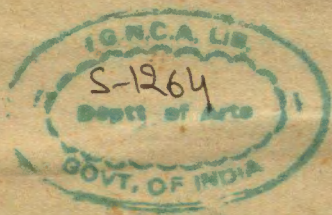
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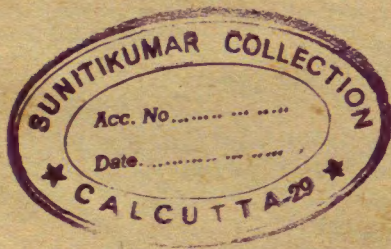
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## FOREWORD

Among the questions which have always drawn man's attention to themselves are those relating to cosmogony. His knowledge of the constitution and extent of the Universe and the laws which apparently guide its working has varied from age to age but, in all ages and in all countries, there have been men who, in all reverence, awe and wonder, have asked 'when and whence did this cosmos, such as we find it today, arise?', 'when and how will it come to an end?', 'what will follow its dissolution?' The belief that there was a beginning and there will be an end is instinctive. Men may be argued into believing that the universe is eternal in the sense that it did not leap into existence out of nothing and will not melt into absolute nothing, that something existed when the universe, in its present form, extended in space and time, a conglomeration of Life and Matter, did not exist and will persist when this universe has ceased to be. But the question will still remain how and when and why did that something evolve or spin the universe out of itself and, again, how, when and why will the universe again disappear into this something? Again, it may be asked 'Is the universe real, in the sense of being objective?' The ordinary man, in his naivette, believes that it is. The verdict of Science is of a dual nature. The world of sound and touch and colour is a world which has no existence outside the consciousness; forces and laws of nature, electric charges and wavicles, are but mental concepts; mathematical formulae which serve to express relations have probably no physical counter-parts; space and time have ceased to be eternal entities, neutral as between all events and



objects. But this does not necessarily mean that there is just nothing beyond, and apart from, consciousness. There is, in all probability, something to whose existence consciousness, in some way, bears witness.

The verdict of Philosophy, as given by the Vedānta, is of a somewhat similar nature, though more positive. The universe, as universe, is unreal in the sense that it is not as it appears to us but identical with, and undifferentiated from, that something which is its substratum, which is one, free from the distinction of subject and object, pure consciousness. This Absolute Reality may, partially, be reasoned about but it is beyond the reach of the Senses or the Intellect. It can be apprehended of Itself and by Itself alone. But the phenomenal world is not, for this reason, to be ignored as unreal. It is real enough to ordinary experience and should be treated as such, till transcendental experience has been achieved. Maya, the Principle of Illusion which is the relation between the noumenal and the phenomenal, cannot be brushed aside by mere wishful thinking.

Man addresses his question about the birth of the universe and its further destiny to Science, to Religion and to Philosophy. Modern Science seems to be of the opinion that, unless something, unforeseeable at present, intervenes, the uninterrupted radiation of energy going on everywhere will result in a maximum of entropy and the conversion of the universe into dead, motionless, matter. It also believes with Jeans\* that "Everything points with overwhelming force to a definite event, or series of events, of creation at some time or other, not infinitely remote." What that event or series of events was, science does not know. Religion clothes its answer

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\*In Eos, or Wider Aspects of Cosmogony.



in language which varies with each system of theology. But the underlying idea is more or less the same. It carries the question to a level higher than that of Science and posits a more or less personal God who is in some way or other the Final and Efficient Cause of Creation and, consequently, of Dissolution. Religion does not base itself ultimately on reason but on a special, transcendent type of personal, intimate experience. This experience may be satisfying enough to those who undergo it but if its interpretation on the plane of the intellect, does not lead beyond a personal God, the question will yet remain as to how desire to create, which like all desires implies a want and imperfection somewhere, could possibly arise in God who, from definition, is a perfect being. There are other questions no less difficult to answer e.g. how can any created being who might just as well not have been created at all or created otherwise be responsible for his actions? and, what is the justification for God's inflicting pain and suffering on some of those whom he has created, suffering which is, quite obviously, not the result of anything done by them?

Materialist systems of philosophy of which the highest viz, Marxism, may be taken to be an example are no more satisfying. Marxism has done well to clear away the mass of shibboleth with which organized religion, in alliance with organized capitalism and feudalism, buttresses up its tottering structure but its solution of fundamental problems is lop-sided. By its insistence on treating consciousness as an epi-phenomenon of matter, it imposes on itself an ordinance which stamps its conclusions with incompleteness.

And yet it is to philosophy alone that we can turn



to help us in our quest. Philosophy must offer a synthesis of the findings of science and the experience of religion and present it in a form acceptable or, rather not repugnant, to reason.

What Indian philosophy has to say about cosmogony may be gathered from the Vedas and philosophical literature like the Sūtras and works based on them. I have not much to say about the latter. As an illustration of Vedic thought, I have taken the Nāsadiya Sūkta, and analyzed at length the ideas underlying it, in the form of a commentary.

The Sūkta is widely known among Western scholars, who, generally, call it the Hymn of Creation. It is the one hundred and twentyninth Sūkta ( hymn ) of the tenth Mandala ( book ) of the Ṛg Veda. The Sanskrit name is derived from the first two words Nāsat ( na asat ) of the hymn.

Before proceeding to say anything about this commentary or its subject matter, it would not be out of place to make a few observations about the Hindu conception of the Vedas. To the Western scholar, the latter are collections of hymns addressed to the gods. These hymns were composed by different individuals at different times and the gods, though they underwent considerable refinement with the advance of philosophic thought, were nothing other than the Sun, the moon, fire, thunder, rain, lightning, disease and death, the various natural phenomena which so sharply remind man of his limitations. They were, in short, those mysterious powers of nature before whom our first human ancestors bent their knees in awe and fear and they have their counter-parts in the ghosts and demons with whom



every savage tribe has peopled the dark and inaccessible corners of the universe. In course of time, as the language in which they had been composed grew out of date, the gods lost their amorphous natures and crystallized into definite metaphysical concepts or the members of a well ordered hierarchy, the simple sacrifices designed to appease them became systematised into a complicated mass of rites and ceremonies, and the hymns acquired the character of revelation and became the final authority in all matters of ritual, law, ethics or metaphysics. This view is not accepted by the Hindu. To him, the Vedas are revelation. The Sanskrit word for revelation is Śruti, that which was heard. He does not believe that the universe is an accidental product of the inter-play of blind forces or of the fiat of a Personal God. Humanity was not, according to his belief, left entirely to its own resources to struggle from savagery into civilization. There are certain branches of knowledge, those which come roughly within the province of the physical sciences, which man could safely be trusted to acquire for himself, even though here also the process would be a long and painful one, but there are others, those which deal with the life of the spirit, which cannot be discovered by any process normally known to humanity. And yet these are of vital interest to the individual and the race. It is laid down in Scripture that those who in a previous cycle—for the process of creation and destruction, in brief, the universe, is beginningless and endless—have, through their austerities, purified themselves and achieved a high degree of spiritual enlightenment, take upon themselves the task of guiding those less enlightened beings who are to be born as men in a succeeding cycle. Some of them act as gods,—they are called Sādhyas or Ājāna-devas. They



are in charge of various departments of the activities of nature. They guide the forces of nature, so as to help the process of evolution, and to lighten the burden of those who assume bodies when the sustenance of life as we know it becomes possible. They are always working to create and maintain the conditions under which unhindered progress is possible. In essence, every thing that lives is of the same nature as the highest gods and, therefore, while we can all, by knowing and willing co-operation, help the gods in their beneficent task, there is no creature so lowly but its volitional resistance will, to some extent, unsettle the divine plan. We are all of us agents of Rta, the divine Eternal Law, which some call God. The extent to which a man frees himself from desire and passion determines the extent to which he can acquire a knowledge of the working of that Law and make himself a willing, knowing agent, a conscious channel for its unimpeded flow. The gods are beings who are working as such channels, the guides and elder brothers of humanity. Other advanced spirits are born among men as their religious and spiritual preceptors and law-givers, its R̥sis and Manus. They come long before the dawn of history to bring down that light which had been handed down from endless eons. It does not matter whether all men are born from one pair of parents or from many, but it is a fact that, thousands of years ago, we find men living in widely separated areas and advancing along diverging cultural lines. Some will call it an accident; the Hindū prefers to believe that this was a result of the unerring law of Karma. The advanced spirits, to whom I have referred as the R̥sis and Manus naturally took birth in an environment congenial to the propagation of that which they had come to teach. This teaching was not meant to be confined



to any one race but it had to be imparted, in the beginning, to those who were fittest to receive it. This task accomplished, these Elders could leave humanity to take care of itself. This, according to the Hindu point of view, explains how and why certain peoples out-distanced others in the march towards culture and civilization; it also explains how it is that while progress in material prosperity and the connected sciences is a process which is still continuing, humanity apparently reached perfection in the spiritual sphere at the very early stage of its development. There has been a considerable amount of evolution in thought and practice but the broad lines were laid down thousands of year ago.

The seers on whom the Eternal Knowledge—Veda means knowledge—descended, who 'heard' it, during their samādhi, periods of meditation, were called 'Ṛṣi'. No one through whom a portion of the Vedas has not been manifested is entitled to be called a Ṛṣi. This knowledge which is also called the Breath of God, is eternal but it did not come down all at once. It was heard—intuitively grasped—by different Ṛṣis, at different times, in different circumstances. The Hindu, in this way, admits a temporal sequence in the body of the Śruti but he does not accept what the Western scholar is pleased to call his scientific analysis of the Vedas, their content and the nature of the Vedic gods.\*

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\* A word about the form in which this revealed knowledge is clothed might be found helpful. This knowledge is not only eternal but, from its nature, infinite, all-embracing. The whole of it is not, need not be, vouchsafed to any one cycle of existence. Different types of man-like beings on different planet-like bodies, the same type of being in different ages separated by great cataclysms on the same planet, may and will receive a different body of revealed truth. Certain elements will be common to all but others will differ. Of course, revelation will not always come in the same language, Sanskrit or other. But in whatever language it does descend—and this of course, will be the language of the then Rishis—, its form will always have a great significance. The Vedas consist of



I come now to this commentary. The Nāsadiya Sūkta is śruti, revelation, being a part of the Ṛg Veda. For this reason, it is considered to be independent of any other testimony. The final proof of the validity of revelation can only be the testimony of one who has attained the state of spiritual exaltation of a Ṛṣi. This is not impossible of attainment. There is no period when such men do not exist on earth, even though we may not be able to recognize them. But, in any case, such testimony is valid only for those who have had that experience. Others can only rely upon other kinds of evidence, those through which other truths are accepted.

This book gives only a commentary on a specific text; it is not an independent text-book of Philosophy. Hence, in explaining the purport of the original I have had to make certain assumptions, which must be borne in mind. The chief among these are: first, that the Law of Karma exists, the second that the experience which the practice of Yoga provides is real and, in fact, the only infallible source of knowledge. In explaining the Sūkta in terms of what I consider to be the essence of Śankara's Advaita Philosophy, a system whose truth also, I take for granted, I trust I have not done any violence to the sense. In certain particulars I have had to differ from the interpretation put forward by Sāyaṇa, to whom every student of the Ṛg Veda owes a deep debt of gratitude and from other commentators as well. It is not for me to say how far my own opinions are correct and more in consonance with the spirit of the text. It will also be noticed by the student of Philosophy, that

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proceeds generally in verse, called Mantras. Elaborate rules have been laid down for their accentuation and pronunciation. This is a very interesting subject, but I cannot pursue it further. Suffice it to say, that the essence of a Mantra is believed to consist not so much in its meaning as in the arrangement and proper pronunciation of the words, I should rather say sounds, of which it is made up.



in some particulars, I have, while accepting Śankara's main thesis, departed from his presentation of Advaita vāda and his interpretation of the cosmogonic process. This is a most interesting subject and I propose to discuss it in an independent book if circumstances will permit me to do so.

This Sūkta has attracted widespread attention in the West because, as MacDonnell says in his History of Sanskrit Literature, "Apart from its high literary merit, this poem is most noteworthy for the daring speculations which find utterance in so remote an age.....It will, moreover, always retain a general interest as the earliest specimen of Aryan philosophic thought." Before commencing the commentary on any mantra (stanza), I have appended, to my own translation of the text, Griffith's version also. It will be seen that the two renderings, very often, do not agree, particularly in stanzas 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

It may, then, be asked, what was the necessity of preparing this commentary. I feel that the great majority of Western scholars cannot do justice to texts of this nature. They fail to enter into the spirit of the thing. For the Western scholar, philosophy is entirely divorced from religion; he cannot admit as valid proof anything that is not the object of sensuous perception or amenable to the discipline of formal logic.

A mind so equipped cannot but feel that when, for example, the Chhāndogya Upaniṣad says that the light of the Sun which is white, is Ṛk, that which is blue, very dark, is Sāma, it is talking pure nonsense. Surely, the author of the Upaniṣad could not have been aware of the existence of sunspots and, even if he were, to say that sunspots have anything to do with the Sāma Veda



or that either the light of the Sun which, by the way, is not pure white but yellowish and the darkness of the spots have anything to do with philosophy is the height of absurdity! Śankarāchārya's comment that this light can be seen during samādhi merely proves that even his great intellect did not prevent him from being flung headlong into the realms of mist and pseudo-logic. No wonder, then, that MacDonnel finds in this Nāsādiya Sūkta "some of the main defects of Indian philosophy, lack of clearness and consistency, with a tendency to make reasoning depend on mere words." I felt, therefore, that it is necessary to bring out a presentation of the whole meaning, from the Hindu standpoint, of this sublime piece.

One thing will be clear even from a bare perusal not only of the commentary, but of my translation of the Text. There is a sequence of thought, a description of the steps of creation, which is absent from Griffith's rendering and he is no worse than other Western scholars. His version may give evidence of curiosity, daring speculation, bold flights of imagination but it does not show that the Ṛṣi who wove his fancy into poetic language had any vision of the Reality or any coherent system of cosmogony in his mind. My version, on the other hand, reveals a process of thought which will command respect, if not acceptance, from all. I should like to add that, to bring out this meaning, I have taken no liberties with grammar or etymology: my only assumption has been that the Veda talks sense and Vedic mantras are the foundation on which the magnificent structure of later Indian philosophy stands.

The two parts of this essay were written at different times, hence a certain amount of over-lapping and



repetition has unavoidably crept in. When it was decided to bring them out together, I decided not to make much alteration in the text, beyond combining their separate prefaces into one foreword. The work was completed in the Central Prison at Fatehgarh. It is difficult to have all the necessary books of reference in prison. Hence, the treatment is probably not as full as it might otherwise have been. I trust, however, that there will be no serious difficulty in following the main line of thought.

The title of the book is *Cosmogony in Indian Thought*, but the subject has, obviously, been treated from the point of view of what is popularly called Hindu philosophy. The reason is clear. Popular religious belief in India today shows clearly the imprint of the rich contributions made to it by Muslim thinkers and saints but the main current of Indian philosophical thought, in all its variants, remains predominantly Hindu, *i. e.*, rooted in the Vedas, in essence.

An apology is due from me for the very unsystematic way in which I have transliterated Sanskrit words. There was on the one hand, the scheme adopted generally by Oriental scholars in India and elsewhere; there were, on the other hand, a number of spellings with the sanction of popular usage behind them. I have taken up one or the other, almost at random, with the curious result that, in one or two cases, the same word has been rendered in two ways. Once again, I can only apologize for my want of method in this matter.

Jalipa Devi, Banaras

Chaitra 27, 1998

(April 10, 1942)

SAMPŪRNĀNAND



## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

The main theme of this little book remains, as it was before, the Nāsadīya Sūkta of the Ṛg Veda. But the second part has been almost entirely rewritten. It incorporates certain pages from the previous book but much of the matter is entirely new. I hope that, in its present form, the book will be able to make a better presentation of the Hindu view of cosmogony in the light of the Vedānta. This view which is discussed at great length in later philosophic literature and described with much wealth of picturesque detail in the Purāṇas, is nothing but an elaboration of Vedic cosmogony, so wonderfully described in the Nāsadīya Sūkta.

The transliteration of Sanskrit words has been brought into line with the international scheme.

LUCKNOW

Phālguna 1, 2005.  
(Feb. 13, 1949.)

SAMPŪRNĀNAND

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# I

## INTRODUCTORY.

No study of Indian cosmogony would be complete, or even possible, without a clear conception of the meanings of certain technical terms. Some of these terms are very loosely used and the confusion which this looseness causes is considerably enhanced by the fact that they are common to all the important schools of thought. Unfortunately, each school attaches a different meaning, certainly makes a different approach, to the terms.

Probably the most important and most glaring example of such confusion is supplied by the term *Mahābhūta* or *Pañca Mahābhūta*—five *Mahābhūtas*, elements as they are erroneously called in English.

Hindu religious thought, whether clothed in Sanskrit or one of the modern derivatives of Prākṛt, takes their existence for granted and even the uneducated man in the street talks glibly of the body being made up of the five *bhūtas*. It would, normally, be assumed that a word so widely used as *Mahābhūta* would have a definite meaning attached to it, at any rate when it forms the subject of conversation among learned men. Unfortunately, the assumption turns out to be incorrect in this case. In a general way, everyone uses these words as the names of the ultimate constituents of the material world but, since the various systems have different conceptions of the nature of these constituents, *mahābhūta* has widely divergent meanings as used by followers



of these schools. The ordinary man, of course, does not care to analyse very carefully the meanings which are carried by the technical terms which he conveniently borrows from the vocabulary of the learned.

To bring out these differences, I shall take the three schools which, among them, say all that has been said on the subject, in Indian philosophical literature, viz. the Vedānta, the Sāṅkhya and the Vaiśeṣika. It is not necessary to take note of the differences that exist between one school of Vedānta and another because, fortunately for us, they all agree on this particular point. The Mahābhūtas are five, Ākāśa, Vāyu, Teja, Apa and Kṣiti, words which are generally taken as meaning Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. The quality of Ākāśa is Śabda (sound). Vāyu has two qualities Śabda and sparśa (Sound and touch or temperature), Teja has one more viz, Rūpa (colour or form). Ap is characterized by the additional quality of Rasa (taste) kṣiti possesses Gandha (smell), besides the four enumerated above. These five bhūtas are the subtlest forms to which matter is reducible but they are neither eternal and absolute nor entirely independent of one another. At a certain stage in the evolution of the cosmos from Brahma, Ākāśa manifests itself. As the Śruti says 'एतस्मादात्मन आकाशः सम्भूतः'—*Etasmādātmanah Ākāśah sambhūtaḥ*—Ākāśa was produced from (or out of) this Ātmā. Then gradually, Vāyu was evolved from Ākāśa Teja from Vāyu, Ap from Teja, Kṣiti from Ap. At the time of dissolution, the opposite process takes place, Kṣiti is absorbed back into Ap, Ap into Teja, Teja into Vāyu and Vāyu into Ākāśa, which, finally, dissolves into that Brahma of which it is a phenomenal manifestation. The whole material universe is a result of the interplay of the bhūtas and their combinations with one another

in various proportions. This process is technically called pañcī-karaṇa (literally, making fivefold) and may, probably, be expressed by the algebraical formula  $5c_1 + 5c_2 + 5c_3 + 5c_4 + 5c_5 = \text{The material world.}$

The Yoga School of Philosophy accepts the Sāṅkhya scheme in its entirety but adds one more substance, a special puruṣa, Īśwar, God. As I shall show later, this Īśwar is the Virāt Puruṣa of the Vedānta, with a different name.

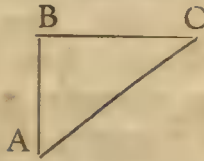
The Nyāya-vaiśeṣika scheme is, comparatively, simpler. It posits nine absolutes, Ātmā (self), Manas (mind), Kāla (time), Dik (space), Ākāśa, Vāyu, Teja, Ap and Kṣiti. Ātmā is really a class, subdivided into two sub-classes, the Paramātmā (God), which contains only one member, and the Jīvātmās, whose numbers are infinite. There are as many minds as there are jīvas. each jīva having a mind attached to it in permanent conjunction. Of the five mahā-bhūtas, ākāśa is one and indivisible but the other four are atomic in nature. The Nyāya philosophers hit upon the atomic theory long before Democritus and Lucretius were born. The smallest particle of matter of any of these four kinds is called a paramāṇu and bigger aggregates are built up by combinations of paramāṇus or groups of paramāṇus in various proportions which, however, need not detain us here. Sound, touch, colour, taste and smell are defined to be the properties of the bhūtas in the same way as in the Vedānta.

It is clear, then, the word bhūta, as well as the names of the associated qualities do not stand for the same concepts in these systems. The crudities of the Nyāya by which term, by the way, I understand, for the



purposes of this thesis, the Vaiśeṣika as well, need not detain us long. Their division of the stuff of the universe into three mutually exclusive classes, the Ātmik or spiritual, the Mānas or mental and the Bhautika or material is not unsound, but it does not go far enough and their treatment of the bhūtas as co-eval with, and causally unrelated to, one another has not commended itself to any large section of opinion.

In the hands of scholastics innocent of all knowledge of physical science, the system easily lent itself to a plethora of theories, each more absurd than the other. It is to this fact that we owe statements like the famous contention of the Naiyāyika that the size of an atom is one-sixth that of a mote in the sun-beam and his equally curious thesis that gold is pure teja. I might, incidentally, refer to a refutation of atomic indivisibility by the mathematician, Kamalakar. It is based on the Pythagorean Theorem in geometry. Assuming that AB, in the following diagram, represents one atom and BC another atom placed at right angles to it,



$$AC^2 = AB^2 + BC^2$$

$$\therefore AC = \sqrt{2} \text{ atoms} = 1.414... \text{atoms.}$$

But according to the atomic theory, you can only have whole atoms, 1.414...atoms cannot exist. On the other hand, the laws of geometry are universal and immutable. Therefore, the atomic theory must be wrong. I am not sure if Nyāya scholars have as yet

- succeeded in getting over this hurdle. They probably ignore its inconvenient existence.

I come now to the Sāṅkhya. This system is, at once, more elaborate and complete. It suffers from the defects inherent in all dualistic schools of thought, because of the two classes of entity with which it starts.

Puruṣas (individual selves), whose number is infinite, and Pradhāna or Mūla Prakṛti (the primeval matrix of all mind and matter) are found, on analysis, to be not ultimate absolutes but manifestations or appearances of the same substance. But accepting the premises of the Sāṅkhya, for the present, we can see that the Sāṅkhya gives on the whole a very logical and coherent account of the development of the Universe. It is for this reason that it has been tacitly accepted, with certain modifications, by almost every one and popular Vedānta is really a synthesis of the Advaita thought of Śaṅkarācārya and the Sāṅkhya system of Kapila. According to the latter, Puruṣa is Pure consciousness, free from all emotion, volition or cognition. Pradhāna is insentient and the state of equipoise of the three principles of harmony, activity and inertia. Coming in contact with Puruṣa, the equilibrium is disturbed and the process of evolution is set in motion. Though the Puruṣa himself is, in reality, changeless, he induces, by his mere presence, changes in Pradhāna, much as a catalytic agent does in chemistry. The first evolute of Pradhāna is Buddhi, intelligence. It covers the Puruṣa as with a veil and, through its agency, he appears, not as Pure Consciousness which he really is, but as a conscious being. As such, he seems to experience the various states through which Buddhi is constantly passing, as a globe of pure crystal reflects the colours thrown upon it by lights of varying colours



passing in front of it, in succession. From Buddhi is produced Ahankāra, the principle of individuation, making Puruṣa an Ego, an I differentiated from all else which is not—I. Four classes of evolutes, totalling sixteen in all, issue from Ahankāra. There are the five senses or instruments of knowledge, the five instruments of action, *viz.*, the senses of speech, grasping, moving, excretion and sexual enjoyment and there is manas, the mind, which is an instrument both of knowledge and action. Added to these, there are the five tanmātrās of sound, touch (or temperature), colour (or form), taste and smell. The five māhabhūtas, Ākāśa, Vāyu, Teja, Ap and Kṣiti issue from the tanmātrās, Ākāśa from sound, Vāyu from sound and touch, Teja from sound, touch and colour, Ap from sound, touch, colour and taste and Kṣiti from all the five together. This is the form in which the doctrine is interpreted by Iśwar Kṛṣṇa and Vācaspati Miśra. I have stated that Sāṅkhya looks upon the tanmātrās, sound etc., as simultaneously evolved out of Ahankāra. There is another variant of the theory which I should also state. Śabda (sound) is the first tanmātrā. It gives birth to Ākāśa from which is produced the second tanmātrā, sparśa (touch or temperature). From this issues forth Vāyu. Vāyu, in turn, gives birth to the colour tanmātrā which, in its turn, evolves teja. The rest of the process can be easily followed. One can clearly see the impress of Vedānta on this theory, which is the one I have adopted in my scheme of interpretation. It will be dealt with at greater length later. The Purāṇas, generally accept this interpretation.

The Yoga School of Philosophy accepts the Sāṅkhya scheme in its entirety but adds one more substance, a

special Puruṣa, Īśvara, God. As I shall show later, this Īśvar is the Virāt Puruṣa of the Vedānta with a different name.

It will easily be seen that there are very great differences among these systems. The differences can easily be seen at a glance in the chart given on page 9.

The three systems of thought referred to above are the most important and claim, with their minor variants, the allegiance of most Indian thinkers. They do not however, exhaust the catalogue of systems of cosmogony. The Tantra schools, particularly their Śaiva and Śākta branches, have had an entirely independent development. Expositions of this doctrine also differ in certain points of detail. Here, as an illustration, I am giving the scheme outlined in the eleventh chapter of the Svachanda Tantram, published by the Jammu and Kashmir Government. In the beginning was Śiva one undivided and indivisible with his inseparable and inscrutable will. He, functioning as the instrumental cause, stirred Himself and became the material cause of the Universe. As this material substratum, He is called, Vyoma. This materialised further as the Śūnya. The literal meanings of these two words in ordinary language are the sky and nothingness or vacuum. From Śūnya was manifested Nāda, the divine, subtle, super-sound, the primeval motion. From Nāda was manifested Vindu, the essence of all mind and matter, of all that is normally knowable. Nāda and Vindu constitute the body, as it were, of Sadāśiva, who is also called the Paramātmā. He is thus the Lord, the supreme knower and object of knowledge. From Him proceeded, Vidyā, knowledge and from Vidyā proceeded Māyā, the principle of illusion. From Māyā were simultaneously

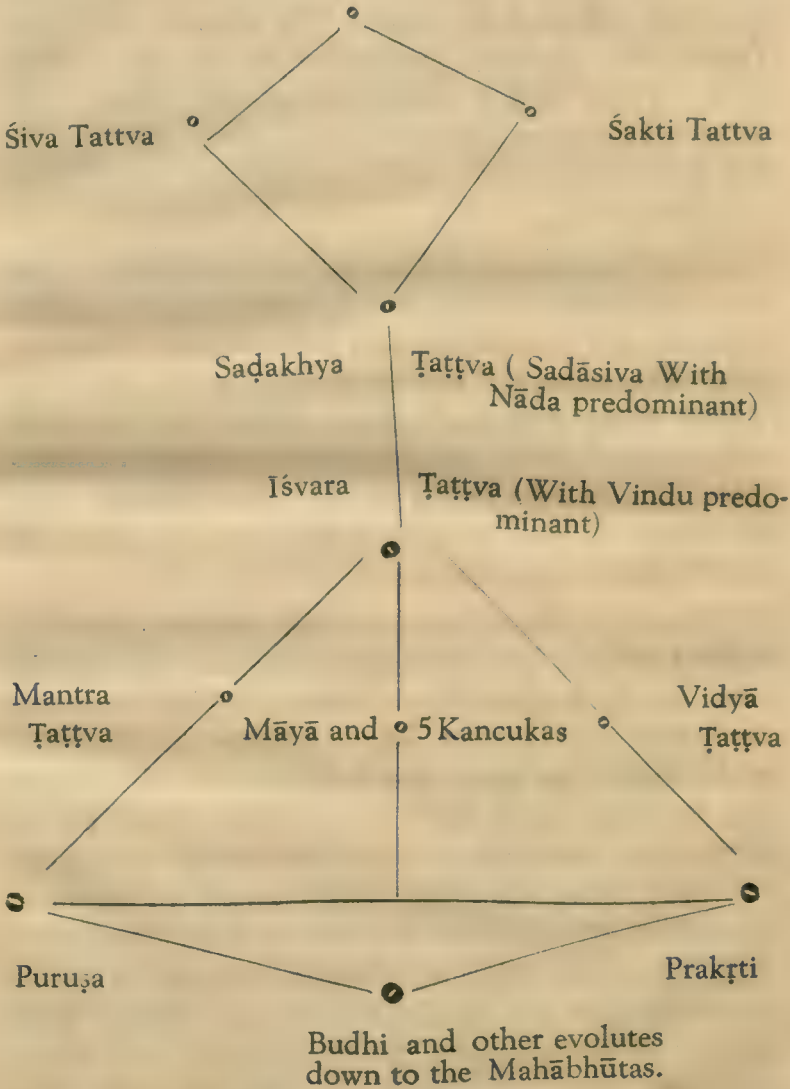


manifested Kalā, Vidyā, Rāga, Kāla, Niyati, Puruṣa and Prakṛti, These words stand respectively for limited power, limited knowledge, attraction (longing, desire, greed) time, the eternal law of cause and effect, Puruṣa and Prakṛti, the last two terms having very much the same meaning as in the Sāṅkhya System.

It will be noticed that the word Vidyā has been used for an earlier stage of manifestation as well. This is rather confusing. However, the difference in connotation is clear. The first stands for the absolute and limitless knowledge which Sadaśiva possesses of Himself and of the Universe which is His evolute. Through His Vidyā, He creates the whole world of Mantras which are really symbols of the Universe of the nature of mathematical formulae, at various levels. By mastering the Mantras, the Universe may be understood and controlled at those levels. Mantras may be of various kinds, composed of the words of a language or the words of a symbolic language or mere sounds, pronounceable or sensible through the mind alone. Vidyā at the lower stage refers, of course, to such knowledge as is possible to Puruṣa as Puruṣa. The rest practically follows the pattern laid down by Sāṅkhya. From the union of Puruṣa and Prakṛti came Buddhi, from Buddhi came Ahaṅkāra. Out of Ahaṅkāra came the five tanmātrās, the five senses of knowledge, the five senses of action and mind. The five Mahābhūtas were born from the Tanmātrās, one from each.

In the chapter on Cit Śakti in his book Śakti and Śakta, Sir John Woodroffe gives a chart of evolution according to the Tantras, of which the following is a slightly simplified adaptation. It preserves the main features, only leaving out details which can be discussed only in an elaborate dissertation on Tantra.

## Parā Samvit



Most of these terms have already been defined. The Kancukas are Kāla, Kalā, Niyati, Rāga and Vidyā.



Parā Samvit means supreme consciousness. Śiva Ṭaṭṭva and Śakti Ṭaṭṭva are its two aspects, not separate substances. Hence they have been denoted by dots, unlike substances, which are indicated by circles. The Mantra and Vidyā Ṭaṭṭvas may similarly be considered to be two aspects of the Vindu Ṭaṭṭva which characterises Īśvar. The difference between Sādāśiva and Īśvara lies in this that in the former the I and in the latter the not-I element is predominant.

I shall not pursue Tāntric thought further but that it is a very interesting subject of study will be evident from the very bare description given above. There is much that is common ground between it and Sāṅkhya. What it shares with the Vedānta is also not very difficult to see. It does not accept the Brahma of Śaṅkarācārya but its Siva Ṭaṭṭva is not very different from the Īśvara or Brahma of the Viśuddhādvaita school of Vallabhācārya.

Coming back to the three major systems, where the learned disagree among themselves, the man in the street may be excused if he understands the names of the bhūtas to mean earth, water, fire, air and the sky. In this matter, he has on his side some of the important philosophers of early Greece (who, however, do not seem to have included ether for the sky) among the elements. Recently, with the advent of scientific knowledge, attempts have been seriously made to equate these terms with those denoting the various states of matter, as science is supposed to describe them. Kṣiti and Ap could quite easily pass for the solid and liquid states and Ākāśa can equally well stand for the ether or whatever other name was given to the ultimate state of matter. Then, quite obviously, teja should stand

for the gaseous state. This leaves Vāyu which is taken to stand for ionized matter. But there are serious difficulties in accepting this facile explanation. The ionic state is, as a matter of fact, subtler than the gaseous and should, quite properly, be denoted by the fourth term of the series, beginning with Kṣiti. But this fourth term is Vāyu which popularly means air and should, on the analogy of Kṣiti (earth=solids) and Ap (water=liquids), stand for gases, which come immediately after liquids. Again, sound waves cannot be propagated in the ether and, therefore, it is difficult to give a scientific account of any supposed connection between the two. Moreover, most of the gases with which we are familiar today and probably all those with which people were familiar in the olden days, except perhaps smoke, are colourless while all of them possess temperature and touchability. For this reason, also, Vāyu, should stand for gas. But this would necessitate a disturbance of the time-honoured order in which the bhūtas are named. Here we are up against a serious difficulty which it is the duty of all interested in Indian philosophy to try to solve. Besides this, scientific theory is no longer what it was when these explanations first began to be attempted. The ether, for instance, is now no more than a figment of the imagination.

Before attempting my own solution, I should like to draw attention to another word which causes no less trouble. It is the word Prāṇa. Ordinarily, it is used as a synonym for Vāyu, i.e. air or breath. This usage is sanctioned by the practice of some of the best writers, religious and profane. And yet the fact that the two words have been used in juxtaposition in the same sentence by no less an authority than the Veda should give cause for serious reflection. The famous Puruṣa Sūkta



says, 'श्रोत्राद्वायुश्च प्राणश्च'—*śrotrād Vāyuśca Prāṇaśca*. From the ear or the sense of audition of the Virāt Puruṣa, were produced Vāyu and Prāṇa. Clearly the words mean different things, otherwise both would not have been used. It may be that in common parlance they were interchangeable, but it appears that at a very early date, Prāṇa began to be used in a highly technical sense. Unfortunately, however, it was unable to shake off its early associations with words meaning wind, air or breath and this has led to disastrous results in Philosophy and Science. So inextricably are the uses of Prāṇa and Vāyu mixed up in the literature on Yoga, Vedānta and Medicine, to name but three subjects, that not only the theoretician but the practical student whose procedure is faultless very often fails to make any distinction between the two. Diseases of the nervous system are treated as due to wind troubles—*vikāras* (defects) of Vāyu along with such troubles in which wind actually plays a part. The wind is supposed to have got into the patient's head in all cases of delirium and other mental disturbance. The wrong terminology employed does not interfere with the success of the treatment, because the fathers of the science had a very correct idea of what they were really intending to talk about, even when they managed to get themselves and, more particularly, their successors involved in the meshes of an unhappy set of technical words, Vāyu among them. In the mouth of the layman as well as of the learned Vaidya, *nāṛī* may mean either a blood-vessel or a nerve.

The same confusion is carried over into the realm of Yoga. Even those who have been practising *Prāṇāyāma* for sometime, and with success, often make the mistake of imagining that Prāṇa and Vāyu are one and

the same thing. By the process of Prāṇāyāma, Prāṇa is caused to ascend along the Suṣumnā nāṇī till, passing through the six chakras, it finally reaches, the sahasrāra. Without having recourse to any text-book on Anatomy or Physiology, the Yogi acquires a sound working knowledge of the nervous system. The chakras are all of them plexuses along the suṣumnā, the spinal cord,—centres where there are complicated knots of nerves belonging to the cerebro-spinal and the sympathetic systems and the sahasrāra is located in the upper layers of the cerebrum. There is no question of the breath passing along or through the nāṇīs. This is a physical impossibility and the standard works on Yoga leave no room for doubt on the point. And yet in treatises and discourses on the subject, it is assumed that in practising Prāṇāyāma, the Yogi is trying to control his breath which is ultimately to be led along the suṣumnā. According to this conception, the nāṇīs are not cords or fibres, but hollow pipes like blood-vessels; quite possibly, they are taken to belong to the same class as the latter. Whether the wind is churned up into the head by the Yogi or forces its way up there by itself during delirium, the result in either case is a suspension of the normal functioning of mind and body. And all this confusion would not have arisen, but for the mistake of using the same word to mean two entirely different things. By not throwing off its swaddling clothes in time, the word Prāṇa has been responsible for creating a vast amount of misunderstanding and arresting development over a wide domain of the field of thought. If proper care had been taken in the use of Prāṇa and Vāyu, the world would have been saved the reading and writing of much learned nonsense and baseless speculation. I do not mean for a moment to suggest that every Vaidya and every



noviciate in Yoga makes such mistakes, but what I have said is certainly true of the great majority.

The subject of Prāṇa is mainly dealt with in text-books of Yoga and in Tāntric literature. Tantrāśāstra, where it does not perplex or repel the ordinary reader, is found to deal very elaborately with the processes of Yoga, the stages in the Yogī's progress, the pit-falls in his path, the occult powers which accrue to him as he proceeds and the final beatitude which he attains. There are, therefore, plentiful references to the nāṛīs, particularly to the iṛā and the pingalā, on either side of the spinal cord and the cord itself, encased within the meru-danda, the vertebral column. There are also detailed descriptions of important ganglia like the solar plexus, and of the exquisite experiences that reward the Yogi as he trains his prāṇa to move up the cord. Much of this description is, of course, of no use to anyone but a person who is himself practising Yoga. The beginner is warned that he must not attempt such practice except under the expert guidance of a competent Guru. One can easily understand how necessary the warning is : the results of such dabbling with the workings of the nervous system may, with certainty, be foretold to be heart trouble, nervous debility, neurasthenia, amnesia, epilepsy, insanity or even death. Now, there can, I submit, be little doubt that Prāṇa in yogic language does not, usually, mean breath or the wind. I say 'usually' advisedly, because there are undoubted exceptions. For instance, when Pātanjali speaks, in the Yoga sūtras, of 'प्रच्छेदनविधारणभ्याम् वा प्राणस्य'—Pracchardanavidhāraṇābhyām vā praṇasya, "or through the throwing out, and holding in, of Prāṇa"—he is clearly speaking of the breath. But equally, clearly, the breath is not involved when the Prāṇa is said to move up the nāṛīs. There the term can only mean vital

energy. This energy is stated to be mostly in a dormant condition. Only a part of it is normally available for use and, passing from one end of the body to the other through the net work of nerves, guides, conditions and makes possible our intellectual functioning and voluntary movements and reflexes as well as those processes of inhalation, digestion and circulation,—metabolism, in general,—and growth which characterise life. Much of even this available energy is dissipated and misdirected, compelled to perform tasks of no importance to the individual or society for want of knowledge and lack of the power to co-ordinate our activities of mind and body. The practice of Yoga gradually increases this power of co-ordination and, what is more, stirs up into activity that fund of energy which has been lying dormant. The Yogi can, therefore, do many more things than before and perform his work with much less expenditure of energy than other men. This is the secret of his occult powers. It is not that he breaks the laws of nature but that he makes use of such forces of nature as either entirely escape us at present or can be harnessed by us to a limited extent and with great difficulty. He accomplishes this object by stopping the outflow of energy to the periphery of the body and the senses, and tapping the stores of energy locked up in the nervous centres, starting from the pelvic gland and ending with the cerebrum. It is not necessary to enter here into the details of this process. It is only necessary to emphasize once again that Prāṇa here means vital energy; the association of which with the body means life and dis-association, death.

It is necessary to explain briefly how Prāṇa came to be associated with breath. The aim of the Yogi is really to control the workings of the intellect. Pātanjali



says योगश्चित्तवृत्ति निरोधः—Yogaścittavṛtti nirodhaḥ, Yoga is the cessation of all activities of the citta or intellect i. e. the aggregate of Buddhi, Ahaṅkāra and Mana. So long as this aggregate is active, the Puruṣa will continue to reflect the passing phases of Buddhi. When the citta is at rest at last, Puruṣa realizes his own true nature and attains liberation. But we know that mental activity is, at ordinary levels of existence, intimately connected with nervous activity. The intellect receives external impressions through the nerves and reacts on the world outside through the same agency. Even the involuntary functions controlled by the sympathetic and autonomic systems produce the impress upon the citta which, in its turn, can, as in moments of extreme emotional excitation, affect their smooth working. To control the citta, therefore, it becomes necessary to control nervous activity. Various means are prescribed for the purpose. A very elaborate code of life and conduct is laid down for the neophyte. What he shall eat and how much of it, how he shall bathe and sleep, the nature of the physical work he may safely undertake, all these things and many more have a bearing upon his success in Yoga. Among these methods are āsana and Prāṇāyāma. The practice of sitting in a definite posture for a length of time and controlling the breath gradually brings about a rhythmic movement of all the cells of the body, minimises causes of friction, reduces the calls on our reservoirs of energy, co-ordinates organic functions and creates a condition of equipoise and harmonic internal movement in which the nervous system, freed from all impediments that might clog its natural vibrations, can act as a perfect conductor for vital energy and yet be perfectly quiescent, thus enabling the Yogi to proceed with the conquest of his

citta. Control of the breath is, thus, of fundamental importance in the process of controlling the nervous system which is the vehicle of Prāṇa and, indirectly, in the process of controlling the citta. Through a confusion which is perfectly understandable, though deplorable, prāṇa and breath have, in this way, come to be used as interchangeable terms. Another contributory cause is, probably, the fact that the surest manifestation of the presence of vital energy in the case of all animal life is the process of breathing, which goes on till the last, even when all other mental and physical functions apparently come to stop. This line of argument also helps us to understand how this confusion has arisen in the domain of Hindu medical science. The Vaidya is not a Yogi and, long ago, he ceased to have anything to do with a direct knowledge of human anatomy and physiology. Such words in his text-books, therefore, as *nāṇī*, for instance, convey the vaguest of meanings to him. Like the ordinary exponent of Yoga, he has also come to identify Prāṇa with Vāyu which, to him, means principally breath. I am confident that my interpretation of Prāṇa will throw light on many a passage in the Upaniṣads and the Tantras which seems utterly devoid of any depth of meaning, if Prāṇa is taken to mean breath or air in any shape or form, although inhalation and exhalation are, as I have indicated above, intimately connected with its presence. I shall show later what place Prāṇa occupies in the scheme of evolution of the universe. At times, Prāṇa partially withdraws itself and the result is disjointed functioning of the organism; in other words, disease of one kind or another. Its total withdrawal means death. But if its centrifugal tendencies are arrested and it is gradually withdrawn from the peripheral parts of the body, it will, naturally,



be concentrated on the inner regions, the nervous centres, resulting in a remarkable expansion of powers and intuitive knowledge, as the artificial walls that seem to shut it off from the parent sea of Prāṇa, which is everywhere and in all things, crumble down. The last stage of this introversion will come when the Prāṇa has been turned completely back upon itself. The Puruṣa will, then, be free from all the limitations imposed upon him by his contact with Pradhāna, nescience will have disappeared, the distinction between self and God extinguished and Mokṣa, Svarūpasthiti, Self-realization or liberation, attained. This explains the superlatively eulogistic terms in which Yogis speak of the Prāṇa: it also, I hope,—and this was the sole reason for what might have appeared to some of my readers to be a digression—brings out clearly the difference between Prāṇa and Vāyu.

The similarity and difference between the two is brought out in a striking sentence of the 129th Sūkta, the famous Dev Sūkta of the 20th Mandala of the Ṛg Veda, in which Śakti, the Power of God, says "I move like the wind, at the creation of the worlds."

### TIME

It will be desirable to say a few words here about time.

The Nyāya places time among the eternal substances, the tantras say that it was evolved simultaneously with the evolution of the Puruṣa and the Pradhāna. It is significant that the Tantra also speaks of the simultaneous evolution of substances like the immutable law of causation or Karma, as it is familiarly called, and attraction. This is a reasonable view of things. Puruṣa and Pradhāna imply each other, because the subject,

the object and the instrument which brings subject and object into relationship with each other must obviously go together. Attraction may be called by many names but it is that which provides the incentive for enjoyment. It includes its opposite, aversion. The succession of experiences is parallel to the experience of temporal succession and one enjoyment or experience is connected with another by a thread which we call the law of cause and effect.

But it is significant that neither the Vedānta nor the Sāṅkhya says anything about time. They speak about events happening in Dik and Kāla, Space and Time, and identify Dik with Ākāśa, but do not apparently tell us what time is. This failure to take up a positive view about time is particularly noticed by those familiar with discussions on time in treatises written by Western thinkers.

The method of treatment is different but Indian philosophy has not tried to fight shy of discussing the nature of time. Quite properly, time has first been divided into two classes, The Real, experienced Time which is Ābhyaṅtara, inner, subjective, personal to each individual and Apparent, measurable Time which is Bāhya, external, objective, neutral. The latter is divisible in a variety of ways and measured by the movements of various bodies selected for their being observable by most men. But real time is a matter of each individual's experience and is not necessarily parallel with measured time. A period of time measured by the same clock may appear inordinately long to one individual and inordinately short to another, according to the mood in which each happens to be during its passage.



This internal Time is the Puruṣa's experience of himself. The instrument of such experience is the intellect. Experience of his own self underlies and conditions all other experience, hence time conditions all experience. Everything that happens happens in time. Every experience adds something to the personality. We change and grow every moment of our lives. The experiencer having undergone a change, the experience naturally undergoes a subtle change. It is not possible, therefore, to reverse the direction of motion along the line of time. One could travel back towards the past only if one could divest one's self of one's intervening experiences one by one. This may not be impossible but is not normally possible.

The Yogi, it is claimed, trains himself gradually to accomplish this. He gets rid, one after another, of the various sheaths that have gradually covered the pure Puruṣa.

He wades through the strata lying dormant in the unconscious or sub-conscious regions of his Citta. Slowly he rises above Ahaṅkāra and rises to the regions of pure Buddhi. Experience is still there but of a purer, finer quality. When finally, he rises above Buddhi, the instrument through which experiences come has ceased to exist for him. He transcends time and enters into timelessness.

Time then, according to this view, is not an independent substance whose existence or evolution the cosmogonist is called upon to explain but a subjective phenomenon dependent upon the conjunction, real or fancied, permanent or temporary, of the Self with the Intellect. Even those who hold divergent opinions about the Self or the Intellect may find it possible to accept this theory about time.

## KARMA

While glancing through the Tāntric theory of cosmogony, reference was made to Niyati or the eternal law of Karma. No long exposition of this doctrine is needed here.

I wish only to state that it has to be taken for granted, if one wishes to understand Indian cosmogony. Every consciously-performed act and many that are not performed consciously, every experience, leaves some kind of effect on the experiencing Citta. This legacy of effects persists even after the dissolution of the body. The individual carries his Citta with him from body to body. He gets bodies suitable to the kind of intellect he has built up for himself, bodies which will enable him to enjoy the fruits of his actions, in popular language. The process is an endless one, seemingly.

This, by itself, would lead to unmitigated fatalism. There would be no escape from the endless cycle. But the self is not an unconscious automaton. The nature of the self is freedom. Every moment it struggles against the chains by which it is bound, even though it may not know that the chains are being forged by itself. Man's experience, at any moment, is therefore, the resultant of two forces, the momentum generated by the past and the self's will to be free. It depends upon a number of circumstances which force is stronger at any given moment. There comes a time—we need not discuss the how and when of this event here, however—when an individual acquires the knowledge and the power which will enable him to break free of his shackles. The cycle is proved to be beginningless but not endless. As is sometimes said

by way of illustration, you can put an end to the seed-plant-seed cycle by parching the seed.

Some of the subjects so briefly touched upon in this Chapter may appear to be irrelevant; at any rate, they might seem to be unrelated to each other. My own opinion is that they are neither irrelevant nor unrelated, but are of inestimable help in forming a fairly complete picture of the process of manifestation of the Universe as Hindu philosophers understand it.

I shall make this attempt in the next chapter. In doing so, I shall have to give extensive interpretations of the meanings of the terms employed in our old books. Such interpretations will in some cases differ widely from those given by the orthodox pundit. We must realise that these terms are not merely the current coin of learned debates which are not expected to lead anywhere: they must help us in understanding the universe as we find it and must, therefore, fit into that body of knowledge which modern science has so laboriously built up. There are vast lacunae in this knowledge and no one is more conscious of these short-comings than the scientist himself but this does not mean that no certainty at all exists. We have a pretty certain knowledge of the lower rungs of the ladder: it is only in the upper reaches that we are still groping in the region of indeterminates and probabilities. And if Indian philosophy has any claims to an understanding of the problem, what it says should not only accord with the results of scientific research but throw light on the dark places not yet reached by science.

My own opinion is that it has such claims and very strong ones. It bases its pronouncements on such knowledge as is available to the intellect but does not



confine itself to this source alone. It posits that a knowledge of reality can be attained through direct experience, attained by the practice of Yoga. In fact, knowledge so gained is the only source of valid, indubitable and complete information about the truth. Even the Nyāya enumerates atīndriya pratyakṣa, direct perception without sense mediation, among the sources of knowledge. I, personally, have no doubt about the validity of knowledge so gained. I believe that the Ṛṣis, the actual, if not the technical, founders of these systems, had a vision of the Truth, had sensed Reality by these super-sensory and super-intellectual means. The difficulty came when they had to express this knowledge, for the sake of others. And this difficulty was due mainly to the fact that the source of the knowledge was super-sensory and, therefore, not available to the ordinary man. Physics and chemistry had not advanced to any thing even distantly approaching their present stages and there was no independent study of the constitution of the Universe. What the Ṛṣis had experienced and wished to describe had, therefore, no secular counterpart to which it could be linked up and no vocabulary, popularly understood, in which it could express itself. For this reason, the Ṛṣis' statement of the Truth remained, at best, symbolic and vague and admirably lent itself, in the hands of disputants possessing neither scientific knowledge nor Yogic vision, to a multiplicity of interpretations and distortions.

We have every right to interpret what the sages and thinkers of yore have said but we should do so in the light of reason, using, among our data, those facts about the nature of the Universe which the researches of modern Science have brought to light.

## II

### FROM BRAHMA TO VIRĀT.

It should be clearly understood that it is outside the scope of this book to establish by arguments the scheme of evolution which it outlines. Its purpose is purely descriptive.

### BRAHMA

The Absolute Reality is One, undivided and indivisible. It is called Brahma. All that exists or appears to exist is Brahma. It is not that a part of Brahma undergoes a change and appears as the Universe. As the famous Mantra says:—

पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदम् पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते ।

पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥

Pūrṇamadaḥ Pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate.

Pūrṇasya Pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate.

That (the Brahma) is whole, this (the Universe) is whole, the whole is taken out of the whole. Taking the whole out of the whole the whole remains.

Brahma transcends space and time, and no attributes, not even omniscience or omnipotence, can be predicated of it. Hence the Vedas describe It by the negative term Neti, not this. It is neither the subject nor the object of knowledge. It is pure consciousness. Quite obviously, it is beyond the reach of reason.

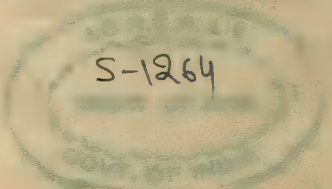
Brahma is not only one and indivisible but immutable. This immutability is of the essence of its nature

and there is nothing other than It and external to it which could induce a change.

If Brahma is all that exists, this Universe can either be nothing but Brahma or non-existent. If it is identical with Brahma, how does it possess attributes like extension in space and time, mutability and diversity which are foreign to the nature of Brahma? By a process of strict logical analysis, one can reduce the whole universe to sensations. Sensations are mental acts, changes in the mind. But the mind is nothing but the sum total of mental states, mental activities. Mental activity is of the nature of knowing, feeling and willing; Indian thinkers use the words Jñāna, Icchā, Kriyā, knowing, desiring and willing. The Universe thus becomes nothing but a series of mental states, of changes in the quality and quantity of its triune knowing-desiring-willing structure. The question remains, how can there be change without something inducing it? The Universe may not be exactly similar in pattern to what it appears to the mind to be, but there must be something which causes mental changes. But if nothing exists except Brahma, both the experiencing mind and that which is the cause of its experiences must be no other than Brahma. Thus Brahma would be causing changes in Itself and appearing to Itself as the Universe.

From what has been said about Brahma in the beginning, it is obvious that from Its nature it is inactive. But to account for the Universe, we must admit that Brahma somehow becomes active. Consciousness which is the essence of Brahma is the potentiality of all mental activity, of all knowing, desiring, willing. If the Universe exists, the potentiality must somehow have become an actuality, what was latent and static changed into what is dynamic.

SKC  
181-7  
SAM





But Brahma has been posited as immutable. Here there is a dilemma; how can that which is immutable be at the same time mutable? To deny the mutability would be to deny the whole of our experience.

### MĀYĀ

Since the nature of Brahma cannot change, the mutability, the change from potentiality to actuality, must be unreal. It can only be an illusion which projects the Universe into Brahma. This illusion, this nescience, is called Māyā. Māyā cannot be real because if it were real, there would either be two realities or the Universe would be a permanent feature of Brahma. But we start with the assumption that there is only one reality, namely, Brahma and that Brahma is changeless. Hence Māyā must be unreal. But it cannot be unreal because unreality, non-existence, cannot be the cause of the Universe or anything else. Again, Māyā is the same as Brahma because, since Brahma alone is real, anything that exists must be identical with Brahma, but it must be different from Brahma because Brahma is pure consciousness and nescience is the antithesis of consciousness. Thus Māyā is both real and unreal; identical with, and different from, Brahma. Like Brahma itself, it belongs to the class of substances which are beyond the reach of language and of the intellect.

A number of illustrations are given to explain the relationship between Brahma and Māyā. None seems quite apposite. The nearest approach that I can think of is provided by the two faces of a piece of paper. Each implies the other; each is present where the other is. It is obvious that no illustration and no process of reasoning can help us to understand the relation of Brahma to Māyā. This is inevitable. One can

understand the un-known with the help of the known but not the unknown with the help of the un-known. Reasoning derives its premises from ordinary experience but it cannot deal with that which transcends the intellect and preceded its evolution. Such things can only be experienced, intuited, not reasoned out. Even in normal life, there are experiences which cannot be understood by any process of reasoning. No logician has so far succeeded in understanding or explaining the taste of a lump of sugar.

Another question suggests itself here. Who is suffering from illusion? I? But I cannot be different from Brahma. This means that Brahma is having an illusion about Itself, mistaking Its pure immutable self for something that is mutable. But could Brahma know its pure form? Could It, as a matter of fact, know anything? Pure consciousness, the potentiality of knowledge, cannot know anything. Knowledge is possible only to an entity that is conscious. So long as there is this nescience, I am conscious and consider myself a separate individual: with the shedding of nescience, if this should ever happen, the conscious I will disappear and sink within the pure consciousness from which it had emerged. Brahma knows Itself through Māyā. It is not only that Māyā distorts Brahma, as it were, and makes It known as something other than it is; no knowledge of Brahma would be possible at all if there were no Māyā.

### PARAMĀTMĀ

Brahma, as seen through the veil of Māyā, is called Paramātmā or Īśvara, God. The rays of the sun reaching the ground through the leaves of a tree produce a pattern in which a myriad bright spots are separated from one another by dark patches. It is somewhat in this way

that the illusion of many separate existences is produced in the One Brahma. This is why Paramātmā, the first product of the union of Brahma and Māyā if one may say so, is called Māyā-Śābala Brahma i.e. Brahma which has been rendered variegated by Māyā.

Paramātmā is really Brahma but the instrument through which it is looked at makes it slightly different. Brahma was pure consciousness but Paramātmā is conscious. The knowing component of consciousness, has started on the road to activity; desiring and willing are still comparatively dormant. The progress towards multiplicity has begun but the multiplicity is as yet implicit. Hence, Paramātmā is also called Avyākṛta, the undifferentiated One. The state of deep sleep in which all creatures merge their experiences into one undifferentiated whole is a reflection of the Paramātmā stage of evolution.

### HIRAṆYAGARBHA

If Paramātmā is conscious, he must have an object of knowledge. But nothing existed beside Himself. So He is both the subject and the object of knowledge. He knows Himself. His knowledge is of the order, I am. Knowledge requires an instrument, something that will bring subject and object on the same platform as it were. There was no intellect then. Paramātmā knows Himself through Himself. He is His own intellect. Looked at from this point of view, as the First, or the Universal, Mind, He is called Hiraṇya-garbha. Hiraṇya-garbha may be said to be the more dynamic or active of the two. Paramātmā is the eternal Witness of Hiraṇya-garbha, the Cosmic Mind. As the efficient and material cause or substratum of the Universe, Hiraṇya-garbha is also called Prajāpati, the Lord of Creation.



## VIRĀT

The nature of the cosmic mind, it is obvious, was pure buddhi, pure cognition. There were no sensations and no memories. As has been stated earlier, so far only the cognitive aspect or element of consciousness had been activated. Hiraṇya-garbha was like the placid water on a windless day that reflects the moon. There is only one image. Paramātmā cognised Himself as Himself, one and undivided, but the process was bound to continue. The affective and the conative elements were also bound to get activated and stretch out for objectives. This excitement, active dis-equilibrium, is described in the Vedas as Hiraṇya-garbha performing Tapas. Just as the disturbed waters of the lake give a thousand reflections of the moon, in the same way Paramātmā appeared to Himself as the many, seemingly became many, because of this agitated Hiraṇya-garbha. As the Upaniṣad says, He willed: I am one, let me become many. The moon remains one as before; the numerous reflections given by the disturbed water are not its parts. Similarly, the many conscious beings which now appeared on the scene are not the parts of Paramātmā. He is one and indivisible, changeless and undivided, as before. The sum total, the aggregate, of the conscious entities into which Paramātmā seems to split up is called Virāt.

In essence, Paramātmā and Virāt are one with each other and identical with Brahma. But there is one very important difference between Paramātmā and Virāt. Just as every petty reflection of the moon is separated from every other by a strip of water, although the water, as such, is not actually cut up into discrete parts, similarly every separate reflection of the Paramātmā is

surrounded or enveloped by bits of the Hiraṇya-garbha, the cosmic mind, although Hiraṇya-garbha is, as a matter of fact, one and undivided as before. Thus Virāt, the sum or aggregate of these separate conscious entities, is Vyākṛta, the Differentiated One.

### SWADHĀ

Mention is often found, particularly in religious literature, specially of the Tāntric School, of the power of God. The Veda uses the word Swadhā for this Power. Swadhā means that which sustains itself. Incidentally, I might mention that it is this word Swadhā which, through laws well known to students of phonetics, has become the Khudā which is the Persian name for God. Swadhā is also called, Ādyā, the Primeval One, or Parāśakti, the Supreme Power. This Power is nothing other than dynamic consciousness i. e. activated cogniton-affection-conation. Quite obviously, Paramātmā and His Power are inseparable, the one cannot exist without the other. Ādyā is, for this reason, described as the Swabhāva, the nature, of Paramātmā. The Śvet-āśwatar Upaniṣad says, Swābhāvikī Jñānbalakriyā cha, knowledge, desire and will are His swabhāva or nature.

The Universe which is now about to blossom out in all its rich multiplicity is as yet in-gathered in Hiraṇya-garbha. Everything—matter, mind, the moral law, the law of causation, the laws of nature—is in a state of latency. As yet, it is a thought in the cosmic mind. Man can comprehend the universe in its essence and fulness to the extent that he is able to attune himself to Hiraṇya-garbha, to the extent that his thought becomes a reflection of the Universal thought.

### BRAHMĀNDA.

In this original form, the universe is called the

Brahmānda, the Cosmic Egg. As the full grown individual is present in the undifferentiated, unarticulated, yolk so is the Universe present in that formless thought. In other ways, also, the Egg is a very good symbol of the infinite but not endless Universe to which science is dimly reaching out today, the universe which bends back upon itself at every point, which has its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere.

I must give a note of warning here before we proceed further. Language fails us utterly in describing these stages of the cosmic process. It was forged to describe those experiences which result from the interaction of mind and matter, namely, events which are conditioned by space and time. It would be meaningless to speak of events, happenings or changes, in the absence of space and time. Consciousness, as such, knows no experience. There was no succession in Paramātmā's knowledge of Himself because it was a uniform, I am. The beginnings of time start with the Virāt and the conscious entities which He integrates. Hence, the words process, envelopment, change, convey no sensible meaning when applied to Brahma, Māyā. Paramātmā, Hiranya-garbha or Swadhā. We use these words, because we can use no other. Equally meaningless is the use of the past tense, and of words which have reference to sequence in time. Where, then, was developed, manifested, became active, are all equally inapplicable and apt to convey a totally wrong impression. They could be correctly used only if there were an actual change in the reality that is Brahma. The process, if it must be called by such a name, takes place in an Eternal Now or an equally eternal Never. The past and the future are but unreal phases of a birthless, deathless, present.



### III.

#### FROM VIRĀT TO MANAS

As we have said in the preceding chapter, the Virāt is the name given to the sum total of the conscious entities into which Paramātmā appeared to be split up. But these conscious entities are like the tiny reflections of the moon surrounded by patches of water which is the pattern presented by the light of the moon falling on disturbed water. Similarly these conscious entities are bits of consciousness, if one may say so, surrounded by bits of the Hiraṇyagarbha. There are no real subdivisions in Brahma, Paramātmā or Hiraṇyagarbha.

#### PURUṢA AND PRADHĀNA

Now Hiraṇyā-garbha, the cosmic mind, is nothing but active, dynamic, consciousness i.e. it is nothing but knowing, desiring, willing. The consciousness-components of the separate entities which constitute Virāt are called Puruṣas. The sum total of the other constituent is called Pradhāna. It is legitimate to use one word to denote this enveloping constituent. Each image of the moon is separate from the rest, but the surrounding water which causes the separateness of the reflections is one and undivided.

#### GUṆAS

The three constituents of the Pradhāna are called guṇas, literally qualities. Sattva guṇa is the knowledge principle, the activated knowing aspect of consciousness, Rajo guṇa is the activity principle, the activated willing aspect of consciousness and Tamo

guṇa is the inertia principle, the activated desiring aspect of consciousness. Desire is either of the nature of attraction or repulsion. In the one case, it wishes to keep an object always before itself; in the other always away from itself. In either case, it opposes a change in the relationship between itself and another object. This is inertia. It is often said that Pradhāna is the Sāmyāvasthā, the state of equilibrium, of the three guṇas. This is the orthodox Sāṅkhya view. But if there were absolute equilibrium, if all the guṇas were equally inert, there would be no mind, not even the cosmic mind, and without a cosmic mind, there would be no differentiated Virāt, no separate conscious entities, no Puruṣa and no Pradhāna. To say, as Sāṅkhya scholars generally say, that the equipoised guṇas are disturbed by contact with the Puruṣa seems hardly correct. This contact of Puruṣa with Pradhāna is eternal. There would be no Puruṣa if there were no non-conscious substance to envelope consciousness, no Pradhāna if consciousness were not there to be enveloped. The one implies the other and the two are simultaneous manifestations of the Paramātmā—Hiraṇya-garbha. Since all that we know in the universe is an evolute of the Pradhāna, it is also called Mūla Prakṛti, the Original Matrix.

### JIVĀTMĀ-

We start, then, with the Puruṣa and the Pradhāna, the one pure consciousness, the other pure unconsciousness, a synthesis of knowing-desiring-willing in nascent activity. The one is an Ego, an I; the other a non-Ego, a not—I. But it must be emphasized that, in essence, the two are identical. When we wish to concentrate on the pure nature of this divine substance,

we call it *Puruṣa*; we call it *Pradhāna*, when focussing attention on its appearance through the veil of nescience. It may also be mentioned in passing, that a *Puruṣa* conditioned by the *Pradhāna* is called a *Jīva* or *Jivātmā*, an individual soul, for want of a better term.

### BUDDHI.

The *Jīva*'s knowledge, due to the *Sattva* *guṇa* or activated cognition principle, was of the order, I am. But there was a difference between this knowledge and that of the *Paramātmā*. The *Jīva*'s knowledge of himself was qualified by a knowledge of his discreteness, his separate identity. But there can be a knowledge of separateness only where there is a knowledge of something that separates. This knowledge may be very vague, but it must be present in the background. The knowledge of the *Jīva* at this stage can be conveniently treated as made up of three components:

I is

Not—I is

I is not not—I

The first could, as a matter of fact, be held to have a substratum of I am I, which denotes the unbroken continuity of the I.

The I and the not—I are different but related, each conditions the other and is known because of the other.

The state in which the *Sattva* *guṇa* is active, in which the cognitive element is active, is called *Buddhi*. It will be readily seen that while *Buddhi* is akin to *Hiraṇya-garbha*, it is grosser in that the activity now functions on the plane of multiplicity. It is the function of *Buddhi* to discriminate the true from the false, the real from the unreal, the I from the not-I. *Buddhi*



is the first evolute of Pradhāna, the first product of its conjunction with Puruṣa. Naturally, it will be present so long as this conjunction lasts, so long as the apparent multiplicity which Virāt denotes continues to exist.

Sattva was active but the other two guṇas also could not remain inactive for long. They were also active. And the occasion was ripe for their operation. The not—I was vaguely sensed but not known. It could be known only by being brought into opposition to the I which was known. The greater the understanding of the not—I, the clearer the knowledge of the I would be. It is only against a dark back-ground that white light is seen at its best. The Tamoguṇa, the awakened desire principle, stretched out towards it and the Rajoguṇa, the active will, strove to bring it into focus. Thus Buddhi gave birth to Ahankāra.

Ahankāra is generally interpreted as the sense of individuation. But it is much more. Its function will become clearer towards the end of this chapter. It is obvious, however, that individuation, separateness and sense of separateness, was already there. What the Ahankāra does is to bring the not—I into active relationship with the I and thus deepen its individuality.

It should be clearly understood that the not-I has no real existence. It is a mental construct. The only limitation on the consciousness was Avidyā, nescience. It would not be wrong to say that the not-I is nothing but this nescience.

The not-I was still not known in its fulness. It was natural, therefore, that the process should continue. The activity of the guṇas grew apace and Ahankāra underwent a change. What was implicit in it became explicit and simultaneously brought forth four evolutes.

## JÑĀNENDRIYA &amp; KARMENDRIYA

The first is called Jñānendriya, the Jñānendriyas to be more precise. These are the five senses of knowledge. These senses are the instruments whereby the not-I is brought into relationship with the I, is made the object of the I. Effort has also to be made to undo the relationship, to remove it from cognizance, should Icchā, desire, so dictate. The other evolute is the Karmendriya, the five Karmendriyas or senses of action. The Sanskr̥t names of these senses may be translated as speech, grasping, reaching out or moving towards, sex and rejecting.

## MANAS

Manas, mind, was the third evolute. It acts both as a sense of knowledge and a sense of action. Its functions are very much like those of a telephone exchange. Just as all messages from one subscriber to another pass through exchange, so do all interactions between the I and the not-I pass through the mind. The knowledge brought from without by the senses of knowledge and the will transmitted outside by the senses of action pass through the mind. The not—I acts upon the I through the senses of knowledge and the I reacts upon the not-I through the senses of action but both the in-going and out-going currents meet in the mind. The form in which the senses of knowledge present the not—I to the mind is called a sensation.

The ahaṅkāra sifts the sensations, apperceives them, brings them into juxta-position with the saṃskāras, the effects, which previous sensations have stored up in it. It is the reservoir of memory, of the sub-conscious and the unconscious. The not-I, so apperceived and now

brought into relation with the I, is passed on to *Buddhi* which performs the final act of discrimination or understanding. The will then intervenes, as desire dictates, to make it a continued object of cognition or to remove it from cognition. This act of the will reaches the senses of action through the *manas*, which is thus seen to be the connecting link between action and reaction, sensation and action.

The two sets of senses are called *Bāhya karanas*, external instruments, in contrast to *Antaḥkaraṇa*, the inner instrument, which is the designation of *Buddhi*, *Ahaṅkāra* and *Manas*. The three are also jointly called *Citta*, which we may translate as intellect. They constitute, together with their external extensions or adjuncts, the senses, a perfect instrument for the understanding of the not—I.

There is a fact to which I must draw attention at this stage. Indian philosophy has never accepted what may be called a static view of mental life. The Western psychologist of a generation that is still with us looked upon the mind as a kind of sensitive plate on which external phenomena left their impressions. Such mental activity as was conceded lay in combining these impressions in various ways. And, in any case, psychic activity was believed to be completely conditioned by, if not actually an epiphenomenon of, nervous molecular activity. Indian philosophy accepts neither of these positions. It looks upon the *Citta* as dynamic. The agents of its activities, the senses, are not passive; they do not wait to be acted upon by stimuli but actually go out to seize appropriate external phenomena.

The stage was now set for such understanding. The not—I could now be investigated in all its fulness



and richness. But the not—I, creature of avidyā, was not outside the Citta, if it was anywhere. It was, therefore, natural that simultaneously with the perfection of the internal and external instruments, it should present itself in forms which these instruments can handle.

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#### IV.

### THE TANMĀTRĀS AND THE MAHĀ BHŪTAS

Acted upon by Śrotra, generally translated as the sense of hearing, the not—I was evolved from the Citta as Śabda, literally sound.

The assertion is often made that Śabda is the property of Ākāśa, the sky or ether. Granting the existence of the ether, even the school-boy with an elementary knowledge of science knows that sound waves and the ether have nothing to do with each other. Sound does not pass through empty space. It is hopelessly unscientific to say that sound is the property of Ākāśa.

The absurdity arises from gross misinterpretation of these and allied terms by the majority of the pandits of today and their Western translators. The pandit refuses to investigate the spirit of what he studies. He will not compare the teachings of one school with another, except with a view to establishing the superiority of his own school and will have nothing to do with what other branches of literature, for instance, the Purāṇas, may have to say on the subject.

To resume, Śrotra is not merely the sense of audition, though on the normal everyday plane of existence, this is its most important, perhaps only, function. Our lives are dominated by the desire for bhoga, enjoyment. What is not enjoyable is not worth pursuit. We are, therefore, selective in our knowledge. The senses are used and trained to give us only as much of

knowledge as will be of help in the realisation of desire. One has only to imagine how miserable life would become if our eyes acted as an x-ray apparatus and our sight penetrated into the interiors of the bodies of those who are the objects of our love and affection.

Confined to the domain of hearing in ordinary experience, Śrotra is really the sense which perceives motion. This term covers not only translation in space but excitation of all kinds. Normally, we seem to have no sense for motion. Terrific as the speed of light is, it does not convey to us an idea of movement. Sound does. Sound comes to us as a sequence of experiences and conveys the idea of order, movement, time.

### ŚABDA

The Śrotra indriya presented the not—I as Śabda. Obviously, Śabda at this level, does not mean sound but motion, undulation, excitement. There was nothing outside the Ahaṅkāra that was in motion. The Ahaṅkāra itself was in a state of violent disturbance. It was throwing itself out in a variety of ways and Jñāna, Icchā and Kriyā were all unsatiated. The not—I had to be grasped. Through Śrotra was cognised this internal stress within the Ahaṅkāra. This was the original excitation, the first Śabda, the form in which the not—I was first presented as an object of knowledge.

### THE ORIGINAL ŚABDA

Motion, excitation in some form or other, is a property of all material objects at all times and in all conditions. It may not yield perceptible sound but indriya is therefore coterminous with the universe.



motion is there. The field of operation of the Śrotra Yogīs claim to sense this underlying motion in the state of samādhi, by freeing the citta from those obstructions, chief among these being icchā, desire, which prevent its free functioning in ordinary circumstances. To distinguish it from ordinary sound which is also known as Śabda, they call it Anāhata Śabda, the Śabda that is not produced by the clash of one object against another. This is another way of emphasizing that it is spontaneous or the essence of things. In mystic literature, it is variously referred to as the sound of sounds, the Voice of the silence, the Logos. Obviously, it is impossible to reproduce pure motion in words. That is why it is called an-uccārya, un-pronounceable. For reasons that need not be discussed here at length, Indian Yogīs symbolise it by the syllable Om. All this is verily Om, say the Vedas. It is also the Sphoṭa of the grammarian, the word from which the whole universe burst forth, unfolded out, as it were.

### ĀKĀŚĀ

The sensation of Śabda having been produced in the Citta, the not—I appeared to Buddhi to be possessed of the property of Śabda, movement. The not—I, as possessing the property of movement, is called Ākāśā. This substance is the repository, the medium, the potentiality, of all movement. It is the same substance which also goes by the name of Dik, space. It is quite obviously a construct of the buddhi.

The not—I which was now Ākāśā was now attacked by another sense, Tvak. The sensation produced by tvak is called sparśa and the ākāśā as qualified by sparśa appeared now as Vāyu, a new construct of the buddhi.

## TVAK, SPARŚA, VĀYU

Sparsa is taken to be identical with touch and Vāyu with the wind. Both interpretations are too narrow, particularly the latter. Vāyu stands for energy in all its diverse forms, electricity, chemical affinity, vital energy and all their other variants studied by the different branches of science. In this sense, it includes prāṇa but, where the two are separately mentioned, the reason is that the special importance of prāṇa is sought to be emphasized. Electricity is perhaps the subtlest form of energy known to us today but this is really for physics to decide. So far as philosophy is concerned, it is all Vāyu. The sense which grasps Vāyu is Tvak. On grosser levels, Tvak the sensation derived from sparśa, may come as temperature or an electric shock, at still grosser levels as the feeling of hardness or resistance. It is well-known that many organisms have no indriya other than tvak; all stimuli present themselves to them as sparśa. We cannot form an idea of how the liberated tvak of the yogī reacts to Vāyu and what his experience of sparśa is.

At present, we have no powers of sensing waves of a higher frequency than those of violet light. We are not conscious of any sensation corresponding to the impact of an actinic wave, for instance, on the organism. And yet such impact is ceaseless and would be responded to, if we had a number of appropriate senses or if one of our senses were made hyper-sensitive to an enormous degree. The sense of touch is the most general in its functions and seems capable, in moments of extreme excitation, to respond even to stimuli of light and sound. Temperature, of course, is its special province.

Sparśa is the name of the sensation produced by primal energy, an effect which we do not normally feel and, therefore, cannot describe. Apparently, it received this meaning because of the property of incessant motion, which is its characteristic in common with the wind.

Vāyu cannot possibly mean wind or air. My contention is that by Vāyu the old thinkers understood the substance, which in a thousand forms as heat, light electricity and magnetism, infra-red radiation, chemical attraction, nervous energy, muscular energy and gravitation, governs the movements of material objects. It is significant that they have left no other word to cover that variety of forces, to use an expressive if not quite scientific term, which runs through all movements and transformations of matter. They were certainly familiar with some of these forms. The words कर्म (karma) and गमन (gamana), literally meaning act and movement, do not mean the same thing as energy which is measured in terms of work and motion but is conceptually different.

### RŪPA TO KṢITI

It was not possible that the not—I should remain as pure Vāyu for all time. Under the influence of Cakṣu, the sense of vision, it developed visibility and gave the sensation रूप (Rūpa), broadly speaking, colour or light. And endowed with visibility, it was apprehended as तेज, Teja.

It will be clear by now that I consider translating this term as fire as an absurdity. To my mind, Teja is matter as it first takes shape out of energy. It is energy which has assumed the property of mass and presents



itself to the human mind as discrete particles, entering into a multitude of relations with one another, through which the mind sees running, like a thread through the beads of a rosary, certain laws studied by the Mathematician. It is extremely doubtful if the laws have any objective validity. They are, in all probability, simplifications introduced by the mind, through the logic of its own nature, on the phenomena studied by it. Quanta of matter and energy and their movements, themselves, possess, I have little doubt, no greater measure of objective existence than these. They are the comparatively static appearance, to make use of Bergson's phraseology, which the ceaselessly moving world of the not—I presents when the mind cuts across a cross-section of it.

We can see why Rūpa is associated with colour. In this state matter, primarily, manifests itself as light. It communicates changes in its movements, the nature and extent of the external forces to which it is subjected, the transformations, it undergoes, through changes in the messages it sends to us in the form of light waves. It was, therefore, not inexcusable to say that light, here called colour, because colour is the essence of the sensation of light, is the property of Teja.

The fourth sense, रसन, Rasan, that of taste, now comes on the sense and induces the property of रस (Rasa) in the not—I,

This word ordinarily means taste. Tastes are classified as six; sweet, saltish, acid, bitter, pungent and astringent. This list leaves out the 'taste' of such substances as are called tasteless in the language of Science. Water is an outstanding example. Using the word in a wide sense so as to include in its significance

the sensation produced by all kinds of objects when they come into contact with the tongue, I have no doubt that all matter has some kind of taste, pleasant or unpleasant, which would be felt by a sensitive tongue and sense of taste. At the same time, I feel that there is possibly some more significance in the selection of this word, which is also used to denote the fluid condition in general and is the name given to all metals in the state of fusion.

Qualified by *Rasa*, the not—I which was now *Teja*, became *Ap*, literally water. The word is always used in the plural and, as so used, would stand for waters. It is remarkable that our old philosophers should have invariably used this word, discarding its synonyms like *jala* or *vāri*. I interpret the term to mean those vast aggregates of matter of which the stuff of nebulae and the so-called island-universes is made up. It is in this that single and multiple stars have had their origin and all the planets in this and other systems, if any such exist, all oceans and continents, the bodies of all things living and dead, are only transformations of this stuff. It is not one substance but a horde of many intensely active substances: combining and breaking up, losing their constituent electrons and gathering up others, probably leaping into material existence out of energy and dissolving back into energy. It is the region from which cosmic rays presumably come. There is, in any case, a vast exchange and dissipation of energy, incessant movement of single units and their aggregates, and, of these, within larger aggregates still. The whole resembles nothing so much as an ocean, placid, perhaps, when looked at from a distance, but in reality subject to a multitude of stresses at every

point. Popular imagination has, not without justification, compared what it sees of such things to rivers and seas and clouds. There was considerable propriety, therefore in the name 'waters' given to this state of affairs. All that we normally designate by the term universe is authoritatively said to emerge from these waters at the creation and to be reabsorbed into them at the dissolution. The Purāṇas contain vivid descriptions of both processes. As an example, one may refer to the ninth chapter of the twelfth skandha of Śrīmad Bhāgawata. It is inconceivable that they should have been so naive as to imagine that things like rocks and metals should dissolve into water at any time; still more inconceivable that they could have believed that objects like the sun and the stars which they themselves described as taijas—made of teja-stuff, which is higher in order of fine-ness—should be dissolved in ap, of which teja is the cause. It would have been against the tenets of all sound logic to posit the absorption into, and emergence from, the effect of the cause. Such an objection would not apply to the sense in which I use the term. The same matter, that is, teja considered separately and in its primordial form becomes ap when it collects in large masses of atoms and molecules under the influence of gravitation and chemical attraction. It then begins to afford occasion for the inter-play of forces, electro-magnetic,<sup>1</sup> chemical and mechanical, which have not much meaning with reference to separate ions, or groups of ions gathered up in the atoms of the simpler elements, or even small groups of the elements, so long as wide spaces separate these units from one another. With teja we soared to the regions of mathematics and physics, with ap, we come to the regions of astronomy and chemistry. Ap is matter that is not as yet split up into



recognisably separate bodies, hence it is often described as सलिल, salila, undifferentiated. But as the whole of the material universe exists in it, is, as it were, deposited out of it as sediment is deposited from the water that holds it in solution, one may aptly say in the words of the Veda, गर्भे दध्न आपः garbham dadhna āpah, The waters were pregnant, held the world in their womb.

It now remained for the last sense, घ्राण, ghrāṇa that of smell, to modify what it found as Ap. As a result, a new quality, गन्ध (Gandha) makes its appearance.

Gandha means smell. Most elements and compounds have the property of exciting our olfactory nerves and there are a large number of creatures whose sense of smell is much keener than ours. It is quite conceivable that objects which ordinarily yield no smell would do so in contact with a sufficiently sensitive piece of sensory apparatus in suitable circumstances. Yogīs claim to have an experience of a world of taste and odour to which most of us are doomed to be strangers for ever.

And the things that existed as ap appear now, enriched by this new attribute, as क्षिति (Kṣiti).

There should be no difficulty now in understanding what Kṣiti stands for. It is neither the name of the solid earth, nor of the atoms of a supposed earthy element, nor even of the solid state of matter. It is a comprehensive name for all gross matter, solid, liquid or gas. It is matter in the forms in which the chemist manipulates it, in the form in which the common man handles it. The constitution of matter at this stage is molecular rather than atomic. That pāṛthiva matter—matter whose constituent

kṣiti—can exist in all three forms is admitted by even the crudest of Nyāya theorists. All that they have to concede, if they wish to be just to the wisdom of their Ṛṣi predecessors, is that there is no essential difference between one kind of matter and another, that gold, for instance, is as much kṣiti as the basest of base metals, no less kṣiti than the most valueless speck of sand in a God-forsaken desert.

With kṣiti we come to the end of the process. We are now in the familiar domain of the Sciences and of normal experience, the world of living things, of plants and mountains and rivers, of planets and stars. This is the world in which mind and matter inter-act. The not-I has assumed a thousand forms and is open to inspection and enjoyment, to cognition, attraction and repulsion by the I. The I can understand it and, in understanding it, understand itself. At the same time by opening itself out, the not-I makes the I's sense of separateness deeper, its bondage and illusion more intense. Hope lies in the fact that it also awakens a deep sense of dissatisfaction and a powerful desire to break the bonds.

### TANMĀTRĀS & MAHĀBHŪTAS

Śabda, Sparśa, Rūpa, Rasa and Gandha are called Tanmātrās, its measures. It is through them that it, the not-I, is measured, recognised, known. Ākāśa, Vāyu, Teja, Ap and Kṣiti are called Mahā-bhūtas, the great existents, the forms which the not-I assumes under the impact of the senses.

It should not be necessary to reiterate what has been emphasized so often before this. The mahābhūtas are

essentially identical with Brahma. It may be said that pure consciousness in its active form is Citta and in its gross form the mahābhūtas. The grossness like the activity is an appearance caused by Avidyā.

I know that I have explained the names of the Tanmātrās and the Mahābhūtas in a manner that in some respects differs widely from the generally accepted view. In giving these new interpretations to the old terms, I am not conscious of having deliberately strained the sense anywhere. I have only started with the assumption that the Ṛṣis were Yogīs who had a vision of the truth derived from yogic introspection, and independent of logical reasoning and scientific experimentation. Nevertheless, such knowledge could not, by its very nature, be opposed to the results of scientific research and philosophic thought. Indeed, it should take us to a stage higher than that to which the senses and the intellect can go. I find that my assumption is well-grounded. It links up the relevant statements of the founders of the Vedānta and Sāṅkhya systems with the most recent findings of science and throws a flood of light into corners that are at present dark, both for science and western philosophy. Mind and matter can be studied in better perspective, in the light of this system of thought. All that is new in my interpretation is its rejection of much of the fanciful cob-webs woven by commentators who were neither Yogīs nor scientific observers of Nature. It will have become more and more clear that it is hardly correct to equate the mahābhūtas with matter as some people have now begun to do. The word really stands for the whole of that component of the Universe which is different from the self and intellectual evolutes of Pradhāna. It would,



perhaps, be better to translate it as the Space-Energy-Matter continuum. Matter, in the scientific sense, would seem to begin with Teja. It is possible that the word रश्मि (Rayi) occurring in the Upaniṣads is used in the sense of matter. This deserves looking into.

It remains only to emphasize that every lower mahābhūta possesses all the properties of those preceding it in a more or less recognisable form. This is easy to understand, in view of their evolution one from the other, in a definite order.

### THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE

Incidentally, I might point out that this account of the process of evolution gives a very satisfactory solution of the problem of knowledge. It is one of the important tasks of philosophy to explain how matter and mind which belong to two wholly different categories react upon each other. The answer should present no difficulty. They are different, no doubt, but not wholly so. Both are evolutes of the Pradhāna and composed, in varying degrees, of the same elements viz. the three guṇas. While the sattva and the rāja predominate in the Citta, the Tama is paramount in the mahābhūtas. But the three guṇas are inseparable. All the three are present, form the very warp and woof, of everything that is either mind or matter. It is only the varying extent of their latency and activity that differentiates one object from another.

### IS THE UNIVERSE REAL ?

Another question may also be briefly touched upon here. Is the Universe real ? The answer is both yes

and no. As universe, it is an appearance, a child of nescience, unreal. The Veda emphatically asserts जगन्मिथ्या, Jagan mithyā—the universe is unreal. But its substratum, that of which it is an appearance, is Brahma. As such it is real. Indian thinkers explain this two-fold nature of the universe by means of an illustration.

A coiled piece of rope lying on the road looks like a snake. In the ignorant, it may cause the same reflexes and generate the same emotions as a real snake. But the man who knows it to be a piece of rope will be immune from all these reactions, although to his senses it will continue to look like a snake. The snake is unreal as a snake but real as a piece of rope. To the man who has attained knowledge all is Brahma and Brahma Satyam, as the Veda says—Brahma is real, the one and only Reality, the Truth of Truths.

### TATTVAS

The Mahābhūtas are also called Tattvas, that-nesses. There is nothing wrong about this term but modern usage reserves this name for the chemical elements. This is a sound practice. This is why I have studiously avoided the use of this word in the text.

### VARIETY IN EXPERIENCE.

The question may well be asked, if the process of evolution was as described above, how is it that all Jīvas do not have the same experience? The question is based on a misapprehension. If there were a definite point of time from which avidyā started, then at any specific distance in time from that point, all Jīvas would have the same experience. But there is no such point. The process is beginning-less and end-less. The Jīva is

a Jīva because of his beginningless connection with avidyā. He has assumed and rejected countless bodies on myraid planes of existence. In each he had numerous experiences, every one of which left its impress on him. All these imprints are stored up in his ahankāra. The Cittas of no two Jīvas are alike in wealth of contents. The senses of no two Jīvas are equally developed. That is why no two children, even of the same parents, are alike in their reactions to the same environment. Psychologists can measure some of this difference in equipment with which each individual starts. The result is that while sensations may be tolerably similar, apperceptions may be widely different. This will naturally lead to variety in the total experience when the buddhi is finally reached. Difference in icchā and kriyā, will naturally lead to difference in reaction. And it must not be forgotten that each new experience enriches and qualifies the Citta. The Puruṣa does not bear witness to exactly the same Citta in any two succeeding moments in time. The Citta is remade in each moment. The same individual, therefore, can never have similar experiences of similar stimuli, in every moment in his life or behave in exactly the same manner in exactly similar situations. It would, for this reason, be unreasonable to expect different Cittas to behave in exactly the same manner. This would be possible only if all traces of an experience were obliterated the next moment.

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## V

### DISSOLUTION

No account of the creation could be complete without a description of the process of dissolution. It should be evident from the preceding chapters that there was no creation in the sense in which the word is ordinarily used, no coming into existence of something that was absolutely non-existent the previous moment at the behest of ■ God bound by no limitations except those imposed by His own nature. There was no such God and something did not jump out of nothing. But there was a manifestation, a becoming, a seeming evolution and the word dissolution could still be used to denote the anti-thesis of this state.

The opposite of evolution is involution and this would naturally be the form of the process of dissolution. At some stage or other, the effect would dissolve into the cause from which it had emerged.

### KHANDA PRALAYA

For reasons which it is the province of Astronomy, Geology and Physics to investigate, a time is bound to come when this earth will meet its end. The Sun will have an important part to play in that final act. The earth will in some form or another be subjected to intense heat and be reduced to cosmic dust. The Purāṇas, which contain detailed and vivid descriptions of the process, invariably say that Rudra, the Lord of Destruction, will at that time assume the form of

Kālāgni, the destroying fire. The Jivas living on the earth will have to find their habitat elsewhere, in some place, whether inside the solar system or outside, where they can conveniently wear out their Karma, and enjoy what they have earned. What is true of the earth will be equally true of other similar bodies. But a day will come when even the sun will have come to the end of its days. This catastrophe may overtake a single star or a cluster of stars. In either case, these will be dissolved into the nebular matter from which aeons ago they had taken shape. The Kṣiti in that part of the universe will be re-absorbed in the Ap. Similarly Ap may be re-absorbed into Teja, Teja into Vāyu or Vāyu into Ākāśā. Every one of these phenomena will be a Khaṇḍa pralaya, a partial dissolution. Every succeeding pralaya will take place at longer intervals than the preceding one.

### THE SEVEN LOKAS

The destruction of the mahābhūtas does not, of course, mean the destruction of the Jīva. As we have seen, evolution was a long-drawn-out process and involution can only be the reverse. There is mention of seven lokas, planes of existence. The Bhūḥ, the Bhuvaḥ, the Svaḥ, the Mahaḥ, the Janaḥ, the Tapaḥ, the Satyam. Each is finer, subtler, than the preceding one. The Bhūḥ is our familiar level of life. It is dominated by Kṣiti, the Bhuvaḥ by Ap and the Svaḥ by Teja. It is the plane of the Gods, Jivas who by their efforts have attained a high level of knowledge and the power which comes from knowledge.

Sacred literature speaks of gods and goddesses; the Sūkta itself, as will be seen later, refers to them.

These beings have mostly bodies which, for all their fineness, are material. These regions, therefore, are material like our earth and came into existence only after the evolution of matter from Ahaṅkāra. Some of the higher members of the hierarchy have only karaṇa śarīras, bodies containing only the three higher sheaths, buddhi, ahaṅkāra and mind—but even these are lower than the stage reached ultimately by a liberated soul. I need not add that godship is as much the result of action as birth in any other body and no less subject to decay and death. A man, therefore, who seeks liberation from that sense of impotence and unhappiness which is the unfailing experience of the best among us should not rest satisfied with anything lower than the absolute cessation of nescience. As the Kāthopaniṣad (2, 1, 2) says “Fools follow desires for external things and fall into the wide net of death. The wise having known the Immoveable and Deathless do not go after transitory things”.

The Satyaloka is the plane of those who are clothed, if one may say so, in pure Citta, intellect. The denizens of the three lower lokas are subject to rebirth and are frequently rising and again falling but those in the regions above do not come down to the lower levels. They gradually work their way upwards. At the time of a Khaṇḍa Pralaya, the Jīvas at the level affected will automatically go to the next higher level.

### MAHĀPRALAYA

A time comes, however, when even the Buddhi is absorbed in its cause and the Puruṣas and the Pradhāna are gathered up in Paramātmā-Hiraṇyagarbha. This is called Mahā Pralaya, the great dissolution. But this



state also cannot last for ever. The Jīvas have not exhausted their karma. They are dormant but only for a time. They are, as it were asleep. In this condition, millions of Jīvas become indistinguishable from one another, for a time. Their past experiences are not extinguished or lost. They do not get mixed up. When the awakening comes, as it must sooner or later, each starts from where he was before. Similarly the cosmic sleep has to come to an end. The about-to-function karmas of the Jīvas produce a ferment, Hiraṇya-garbha performs His tapas, and the cycle begins again. Each cycle is similar to the preceding one, but not exactly identical, because the Jīva is not exactly identical with his former self: he is richer by the experiences that he has undergone in the interval. Thus the process goes on, without a beginning and without an end.

### DHARMA

The individual Jīva, however, is not doomed to perpetual slavery. There are moments when, in one bound, he steps into timelessness and realizes that underlying unity which avidyā persists in presenting to him as a wild diversity. The performance of a truly moral act is one such occasion. The man who rushes into a roaring torrent or jumps into a burning house to rescue another realises in that instant of supreme self-sacrifice his one-ness with that other. A lover may have this feeling of identity with the object of his affection. A mother may similarly lose herself in her child. But this feeling of identity has for its background a vast field of disparateness. The lover and the mother isolate the object of their affection from everything and everyone else. But the performance of the truly moral

act is characterized by identity with one and separate-ness from none. As a matter of fact, the many vanish for the time being. All of us cannot jump down roaring torrents or into burning houses but the performance of ethical actions, the living of a continuous life of self-sacrifice, the conscious and continuous service of larger selves—country, society, humanity, all living things—is a preparation for that Citta-prasāda, purification and uplift of the Citta, which leads ultimately to the attenuation of avidyā. Pātañjali enjoins that one should always engage in maitri, karuṇā, muditā and upekṣā, striving to increase the store of happiness and virtue in the world, to decrease the store of unhappiness and to combat those who exploit the weak and work injustice on the helpless, without being swayed by feelings of personal animosity or revenge towards them. All this may be briefly expressed by saying that one should ceaselessly engage in the pursuit of Dharma.

### THE PERCEPTION OF BEAUTY

Aesthetic perception also brings about a transcendence of the limitation of space and time and the realization of that oneness which underlies all multiplicity. The rythm of music which is the highest among the arts is a reflection, an image, of the rythm which is the essence of ākāśa. In the moment that he intuits beauty, the percipient is lifted above the distinction of subject and object and becomes one with all that is. Paramātmā is, in the words of the Vedas, the Purāṇa Kavi, the Ancient Seer and the Ancient Poet. The artist is a seer in his vision and a poet in his expression of what he has seen. The technique of his art and the instruments that he has perforce to use, paper, stone or metal, words, are all inadequate to his purpose and impose

their limitations upon him. Even the pure tones of the muscians are imperfect. But a sympathetically attuned intellect can pierce behind the veil and get a glimpse of the world which the artist has tried to portray. Beauty is present everywhere, for it is only another name for that Reality which is present in everything because it is everything. The meanest object can lead to such a vision, if we could divest ourselves of the personal element, the icchā or desire element, in ourselves, if we would contemplate it for what it is, not for what it means to us. But this world is a sealed book to most. There are few of whom it cannot be said :

A primrose by the river's brim  
 A yellow primrose is to him  
 And it is nothing more.

### YOGA AND SAMĀDHI

The vision of the reality glimpsed in either of these ways is a unique experience. But it is short-lived and it cannot be had at will. For this reason, its effect on the individual is not deep and lasting. He is exhilarated by his vision but dragged down to earth again. The way of the mystic provides a third approach.

Yoga is a supreme discipline, a course of severely regulated life. The neophyte has to surrender himself to a Master. Pursuit of the moral life, austerity, introspection, study, all these are parts of the—preparation that he has to make before he gets his Dīkṣā, initiation into the mysteries. What the initiate is taught by the Guru may not be revealed but the essential features of the process of Yoga are not difficult to understand. The object of the Yogī is to reverse the process by which this multiform universe has seemingly come into existence.



He tries to train his prāṇa so that its ceaseless flow may not dissipate itself. Guided by desire, the senses bring us only partly in contact with the world outside. By subduing desire, the Yogī frees his senses from their bondage and they present to him a world of sensations of which we can form no idea. Having given all the experiences of which they are capable, Kṣiti and the other mahābhūtas melt each into its predecessor till only ākāśa remains. Ākāśa is also to be resolved into śabda, which along with the mind and the senses, which have now no object to pursue, is absorbed into the ahaṅkāra. He now lives through his past karma. When this is very nearly exhausted the ahaṅkāra merges into the buddhi and this in turn in the Pradhāna. The Jīva is now a pure Puruṣa who enters into the Paramātmā. The Yogī thus experiences the Khaṇḍa Pralayas and the Mahā Pralaya within himself. He can now say, in the words of the Vedas, अहं ब्रह्मास्मि Aham Brahmasmi, I am Brahma.

I have said that the Yogī very nearly exhausts his Karma. This should not be difficult to understand. Every action is either a cognition, an affection or a conation and its effect for the performer thereof is only a modification of his intellect, leading to further acts on some suitable occasion in the future. The Yogī delves down into the depths of his vast reservoir of stored-up memories, brings each up into the focus of consciousness. He does to himself what the psycho-analyst does, to a limited extent, to his patient. A little, the little which he would normally experience on the mundane level of existence of his present life, might remain. It is this little which keeps life going when he comes down from his samādhi, which is the name given to this state of suprasensuous experience.

## MUKTI

He is now Mukta, liberated from the bondage of avidyā, nescience, for ever. He is now the Brahma that he always was and always will be and knows himself for what he really is. Coming down from Samādhi, he is possessed of infinite knowledge and infinite power. He sees everything in himself and himself in everything. The universe which is nothing but what he appears to himself through the Citta is now an open book to him, a book written by himself.

## SĀKṢĀTKĀRA

Logic can here put the question: who is liberated ? If the one is the All, the liberation of one should mean the liberation of all and consequently, the disappearance of the Universe. Therefore, no one has been so far liberated and no one ever will be. In bringing forward these doubts, logic unwittingly makes a great many assumptions, chief among these being the real existence of the All, of the One and of the Universe.

I can only say, logic can ask the question but cannot comprehend the answer. This is a matter for Sākṣātkāra, realization, not reasoning or any other form of intellection. Even intuition is but a faint echo of what realization is. The intellect cannot compass what transcends itself.

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**COSMOGONY IN THE VEDAS**  
OR  
A COMMENTARY ON THE NĀSADIYA SŪKTA.



## THE NĀSADIYA SŪKTA AND COMMENTARY

नासदासीन्नो सदासीत्तदानीं नासीद्रजो नो व्योमा परा यत् ।  
किमावरीवः कुट्टकस्य शर्मन्नम्भः किमासीद्गहनं गभीरम् ॥१॥

### GRIFFITH'S TRANSLATION

1. There was not non-existent nor existent ;  
There was no realm of air, no sky beyond it,  
What covered in, and whom ? and what gave shelter ?  
Was water there, unfathomed depths of water ?

### AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION

1. At that time, there was neither Asat (non-being) nor Sat (being) ; there was neither the earth nor the sky nor that which is beyond (it). Where was that which envelopes ? What had a place and where ? Did the vast and deep waters exist ?

### COMMENTARY

As has been stated in Chapter two, Paramātmā (God) is the Efficient and Material Cause of the universe. Hence this description of the process of creation, naturally, starts with Him. In the very beginning, we are faced with a difficulty. Paramātmā transcends space and time, whether these words are used in the sense in which science today speaks of the space-time continuum or in accordance with the usage of ordinary language which treats them as infinitely extended and neutral as between any two events and observers. Words, after all, are devices for expressing our ordinary experience and they are not suitable vehicles for translating ideas which reach down from a level beyond such experience. Bear-

ing this in mind, we see that the words 'at that time' do not refer to any point of time, howsoever remote but to that state which preceded that configuration of material, using this word, as Whitehead suggests, to denote not only matter but things still more subtle, which we call the universe. It is really an eternal Now and, from another point of view, a Never.

To say that there was neither being nor non-being is to employ language that conveys no meaning, if these words are to be taken in a strictly literal sense. In the *Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad* of the *Yajurveda*, the name *Asambhūti* (non-existence) has been given to *Pradhāna*. *Asat* therefore, also signifies the *Pradhāna* and *Sat*, quite obviously, the *Puruṣa*. By denying the existence both of being and non-being, all diversity and opposition of mind to matter, of subject to object, of enjoyer to the thing enjoyed, has been denied. There was God alone, one and undifferentiated.

This should have been quite sufficient to describe the pre-cosmic state of affairs. But the matter is further elucidated, by specifically mentioning a few important things which had no existence then. The earth and the sky, the *Bhurloka* and the *Svarloka*, the abodes of men and gods, were not, in existence, nor was there the existence of that which is above the heavens, viz- *Maharloka*, *Janaloka*, *Tapaloka* and *Satyalo*ka, the four regions composed of non-material, purely intellectual, substance, ranging from Mind to *Buddhi*.

The questions that follow are really emphatic statements, as each implies a definite answer in the negative. A *Brahmāṇḍa* or cosmic egg, as has been

stated earlier, \* comprises a whole universe, hence it is called that which covers ( the universe ). Creation had not reached the stage of evolution of a Brahmāṇḍa. There was nothing which had a place i.e. could occupy space and there was no space to occupy. By implication, time has also been denied.

The word 'waters' has been used as a symbol for all the elements. It has been selected because the absence of water signifies the absence of conditions suitable for the functioning of life, as we know it. This truth to which biological science today bears witness appears to have been appreciated long ago. Reference to it is made in several places in the Vedas.

न मृत्युरासीदमृतं न तर्हि न रात्र्या अह आसीत् प्रकेतः ।  
आनीदवातं स्वधया तदेकं तस्माद्दान्यन्न परः किञ्चनास ॥ २ ॥

### GRIFFITH'S TRANSLATION

2. Death was not there, nor was there ought immortal :  
No sign was there of the days' and nights' divider.  
That one thing, breathless, breathed by Its own nature :  
Apart from It was nothing whatsoever.

### AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION

2. There was, then, neither death nor immortality.  
There was no sign of day and night. That one breathed  
without air with His power. Verily, there was nothing  
other than He.

### COMMENTARY

This is an amplification of what has been said in the preceding mantra. Clearly, if there was no life in the biological sense, there could be no death and the

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\* Vide Chapter 2,



question of immortality or otherwise would not arise. But the words 'death' and 'immortality' have probably been used in another sense than the purley literal. In the *Īsāvāsyā Upaniṣad*, in such passages as 'He goes beyond death through *vināśa*' (destruction), the word 'death' has been employed to denote the ordinary actions and knowledge of the *jīva*. Similarly, the attainment of godship has been called immortality in the *Kaṭhopanīṣad*. By mentioning the absence both of death and immortality, probably attention is being drawn to the fact that the *karmas* of the *jīvas*, the fruits of their knowledge and the employment of that knowledge in the form of action, were in a state of suspense, the *jīvas* themselves being in the state which, for want of a better word, I have called *comatose* in Chapter two. The reference to the absence of any sign of day and night might mean either that there was no activity, no movement and, consequently, no succession of events or, what comes very nearly to the same thing, that time did not exist. To say, as Griffith and some other translators have done, that there was no sign of the divider of day and night might mean that there was absolute darkness (or, perhaps, absolute light). Neither of these terms could be posited of what existed then, in any but a purely symbolic sense and this has been done, so far as regards darkness, in the succeeding mantra.

There is a well-known Vedic mantra which says "His knowledge, will and action are natural" i.e. not determined or conditioned by anything external. The same fact has been stated here by saying that He breathes without air with His power. ☸ This emphasizes His independence of all external instruments. As stated earlier, Power, Omnipotence, is a predicate eminently attributable to God.

The use of the words 'breath' has another significance. Breathing is a rhythmic process which is associated with life and life alone. Breathing without air implies what mystic literature describes as motion without movement, intense activity without any external manifestation. But another concomitant of life is consciousness. Even the lowest manifestation of life shows sensitivity to stimuli. What breathes is conscious. The implication of saying that Paramātmā breathes is that He is conscious. God is not pure knowledge, pure consciousness, like Brahma but the subject of knowledge, a knower. In the absence of anything else, He is also the object of his own knowledge. He knows Himself and knows that He knows Himself.

तम आसीमत्तसा गूढमग्रेऽप्रकेतं सलिलं सर्वमाहृतम् ।  
तुच्छयेनाभवपिहितं यदासीत्तपसस्तन्महिना जायतैकम् ॥३॥

### GRIFFITH'S TRANSLATION

3. Darkness there was: at first concealed in darkness.  
The All was indiscriminate chaos.  
All that existed then was void and formless:  
By the great power of warmth (tapas) was  
born that unit.

### AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION

3. There was, at first, darkness enveloped in darkness; ( like ) undifferentiated waters ( was ) all this. Through the power of the tapas of that All veiled by the trivial was born (that) One.

### COMMENTARY

The word Darkness is not to be taken in its literal sense here. The word in the original which also means

inertia is Tamas. Brahma which is devoid of all attributes is called inertia or darkness. The same word can also fitly describe Māyā, which is Pure Insentience. Thus Paramātmā, the synthesis of Brahma and Māyā, is Darkness enveloped in Darkness. He was undifferentiated like water in itself, which is not differentiated into drop, cloud, steam, ice, river, spring or sea. In another place, the Śruti says, 'All this is, verily, Brahma' and Māyā 'Illusion' which is destroyed by knowledge, is quite correctly called the Trivial. Therefore, God is the All, veiled by the Trivial. The text can also be translated as "the Omnipresent covered by the non-existent." Another rendering is 'The Trivial enveloped by the Trivial.' This would be another way of expressing the idea implied in the phrase 'darkness enveloped in darkness'. The word Brahma is derived from the root Br̥h and means that which is extended. For this reason, and for no other, 'Omnipresent' can be said to be a name for Brahma. And Māyā which has no existence except as an illusory anti-thesis of Brahma can be called non-existent. In this sense, also, the phrase can refer only to Paramātmā. From his tapas (that) One is said to have been produced. Translating tapas as warmth, as western scholars do, makes no sense. 'Tapas' is ordinarily used in the sense of austerities. Now what austerities could God be said to have performed? Obviously, the word has some special meaning as applied to Him. This is made clear, in another place 'His tapas is of the essence of knowledge. God's knowledge, namely a particular phase of his consciousness, His giving to His mind a particular trend, so to speak, is His tapas. This means that, at this stage the universe first came into being as a thought in God's consciousness. It shaped itself as an idea in His mind, if one



may use this word in connection with Gods' consciousness which functions without instruments and neither needs any stimulus from outside nor has to react upon anything external to Itself. As a result of that tapas was born, was manifested, Hiraṇyagarbha, the One with, or of, the golden womb.

कामस्तदग्रे समवर्तताधि मनसोरेतः प्रथमं यदासीत् ।  
सतो बन्धुमसति निरविन्दन् हृदि प्रतीप्या कवयो मनीषा ॥४॥

### GRIFFITH'S TRANSLATION

4. Thereafter rose desire (Kāma) in the beginning  
Desire the primal seed and germ of manas (mind)  
Sages, who searched with their hearts' thought  
discovered  
The existent's kinship in the non-existent.

### AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION

4. First Kāma (desire) was born from His mind,  
thence that which was the first seed. Sages, having  
searched in their hearts, through wisdom, found the  
place of the existent in the non-existent.

### COMMENTARY

Hiraṇyagarbha is that manifestation of God which holds the whole universe which is now about to unfold itself in all its diversity, as a child is held in the mother's womb. \* He is not different from God, in His essence. He is also called Prajāpati, the Lord of creation. The Veda refers to Him in several places. Compare, for instance, the following which is the first mantra of the first Sūkta of the 10th Mandala of the Rg Veda. "In the

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\* Hiraṇyagarbha as has been stated in Chapter Two is Paramatma in His aspect of universal mind.

beginning was Hiranygarbha. ( On being ) born, he was the absolute lord of creation. He established the earth and skies ( in their places )” Hiranyagarbha is so to say the personal, dynamic, aspect of God, the aspect in which God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

A desire arose in Him. This desire is made more explicit in other places. He willed, let me become many. But the question remains : why should this desire have arisen in Him ? A Sūfī poet says that He wanted to see Himself and therefore He assumed all forms. But why this narcissism in a perfect being ? Others would have it that the universe is his *līlā*, play, but surely, so exalted a personality should be above such childish frolicsomeness. The fact is that the word desire in this context stands for Hiranyagarbha’s knowledge of the process of creation, maintenance and destruction of the universe and for His willing that the process shall start. The reason why He willed in this way is that the past karmas of the *jīvas* who were, so to say, gathered up in Him were now in the condition to bear fruit and suitable vehicles for action and enjoyment had to come into existence. In this sense, and this sense only, is God the creator of the universe. If he were to be credited with creating *jīvas*, *ab initio*, along with a world determined by nothing but His own wish, the responsibility for their actions and the fruits thereof would be entirely His. The cumulative effect of the at-present dormant actions of the *jīvas* is what stimulates God’s will. But this should not be taken to contradict those passages in Scripture which declare God to be absolutely independent and His will to be free from all limitation. He Himself is the Eternal Law and cannot be said to bind Himself or

interfere with His own freedom. The role apparently played by a magnet in the neighbourhood of a mass of iron filings may be taken to illustrate that of Paramātmā in the matter of creation. The filings arrange themselves in accordance with what may be called the inherent law of their nature but the presence of the magnet is necessary to set the law in motion. Similarly the universe will generate and regulate itself in accordance with the latent effects of the past action of the jīvas but God, as Hiranyagarbha, must set the ball rolling.

From God's mind, as the result of the functioning of His will and the materialization of the idea of the universe present to His consciousness, arose That which was the first seed, which contained in Itself the whole Universe as the seed holds in itself, in embryo, the mighty tree. This refers to Virāṭ.

At this stage, when evolution is to descend to the level at which we cognize the Universe, it seems necessary to emphasize the unity that underlies all apparent diversity, because there is a danger of the attention being diverted from the essence of things to matters of detail, from the substratum of Reality to its enveloping Appearance. The mantra therefore, says that the place of the Existent, the Brahma, the Reality, in the non-Existent Māyā, the Appearance, was found by the sages. The sense is not altered by accepting Griffith's version that they discovered the kinship of the Existent in the non-existent. That this kinship is really of the nature of absolute identity is made clear in several places, elsewhere. For instance, the Muṇḍak Upaniṣad says: "As thousands of sparks come out of a bright fire, in the same way, objects of all kinds come out of that



inexhaustible One and again enter It." The 19th Mantra of the 31st Chapter of the Yajurveda says "Though (really) unborn, Prajāpati enter the womb and is born many times and in many forms." If Sat and Asat are taken to have been used in the sense of Puruṣa and Pradhāna, as in the first mantra, then the Sages are here said to have discovered the Puruṣa enmeshed by the evolutes of the Pradhāna. The realization of this fundamental unity is not the result of the ordinary processes of reasoning. Its instrument is manit, a word which I have translated as wisdom. Griffith calls it thought. This is not a very satisfactory rendering. Śankarāchārya, in his commentaries on the Upaniṣads, says that manit is that highest function of the Buddhi (intellect), which governs the mind and makes no mistakes. In the Yoga Darśana, Patanjali says that, as the result of his practice, the Yogī develops Rtam-bharā Prajnā—the wisdom that is imbued, through and through, with Truth. Such knowledge, then, is to be attained, not through mere reasoning, but by purifying the Buddhi through the practice of Yoga.

A reference might be made, in passing, to a curious doubt which sometimes assails those who study this subject for the first time. They ask 'Is the whole Parāmātmā changed into the Virāṭ and thus into the cosmos ?' or, in other words, Is this Universe; the whole of God ? It is difficult to put into words what can be realized only through the transcendent knowledge gained by the practice of the highest Yoga; still, it should be clear by now that we cannot speak either of any changes taking place in God or of the whole of God and of His parts. Partition requires the existence of at least two entities : that which is to be partitioned and that which shall serve as the partitioning wall. In the

Absolute Oneness of God, there is no room for division: there are no parts and there is no whole. What are called parts owe their seeming existence to nescience and disappear with its destruction. The meaning of the following passage may, profitably, be pondered over, in this connection: "All this verily is a manifestation of His greatness; that ( Virāt ) Puruṣa is greater than this. One fourth of Him is this universe: the immortal three-quarters are in the Divine regions" ( R̥g Veda-10,90,3 ). There is another passage which brings this out still more clearly, That ( God ) is full, this ( the Universe ) is full. Having taken out the full from the full, the full alone remains."

तिरभोनो विततो रश्मिरेषामधःस्विदासीदुपरिस्विदासीत् ।  
रेतोषा आसन् महिमान् आसन्स्वधा अबस्तात् प्रयतिः परस्तात् ॥५॥

#### GRIFFITH'S TRANSLATION

5. Transversely was their severing line extended:  
What was above it then, and what below it ?  
There were begetters, there were mighty forces,  
Free action here and energy up yonder

#### AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION

5. Their ray was spread out in slanting direction:  
it was downward, it was upward. There were holders  
of seed, there were the great powers; the food was  
below, the enjoyer, above.

#### COMMETNARY

Virāt has been called the First Seed in the preceding mantra. On the one hand, He is the sum total of all that constitutes the world, all the matter and energy, all the thought and life and law of which it is made up in all

the various planes of its existence. On the other, as a manifestation of Paramātmā, He permeates it through and through and yet transcends it. The first two verses of the 90th Sūkta of the 10th Maṇḍal, the famous Puruṣa Sūkta, describe Him in these words.

“The ( Virāṭ ) Puruṣa has thousands of heads, thousands of eyes, thousands of feet. He pervades the Universe from all sides and transcends these fingers (viz. this world of ten directions). The Puruṣa is all this, what is past and what is to be. He is the lord of immortality (viz. godship) and reaches beyond the Universe.” The same Sūkta describes, in figurative language, how the whole world—the highest regions and the lowest, all heavenly bodies, all men and other living things—form parts of the body of Virāṭ.

As the Universe unfolds itself, it spreads itself out in all directions, up, down and transverse in space and by implication, backwards and forwards in time. It also undergoes progressive multiplication in detail. But, as analysis reveals, all this multiplicity may be reduced to the duality of Puruṣa and Pradhāna. As the mantra says, there were holders of seed, the begetters, as Griffith calls them, and there were the great forces. The Puruṣas, whose numbers are infinite, are called holders of seed, because the Puruṣa is the nucleus round which the world evolves; there would be no world, if the Puruṣa had not to work out his destiny as moulded by his previous actions and to forge a fresh chain of fruits and actions round himself. Pradhāna, which is the matrix, the material cause, of all that goes by the name of mind, matter and motion and is itself composed of the three all-embracing principles, called the three guṇas, the principles of inertia, activity and equipoise, is designated the



'great forces'. This is further made clear by saying that food was below, the enjoyer above. Puruṣa is the enjoyer and Pradhāna is the object of his enjoyment. In Sāṅkhya literature, they are also called the seer and that which is seen. The word in the text which I have translated as 'enjoyer' is Prayati, the active one. Puruṣa, being conscious, supplies the directive element in the union and may, therefore, be called the active one but, in opposition to food which is the symbolic epithet applied to Pradhāna, it is better to render the word as 'enjoyer'. Instead of 'below' and 'above', Griffith uses the words 'here'

#### A note on further stages of evolution

The Sūkta stops at this stage. How the process of evolution continues after this has been described at length by Kapila and the other Sāṅkhya philosophers and discussed in the body of this book. They end their description with the evolution of what may be called mind and matter, to use the not very accurate language of every day speech and popular philosophy. It is for science now to take up the tale. Moving on converging lines, Physics, Mathematics, Biology, Psychology and Logic are nobly striving to perform this task. As a result, the chasm which seemed to separate science from Philosophy is perceptibly and rapidly narrowing day by day.

While on this subject, I should like to draw attention to the 90th Sūkta of the 10th Mandala of the Rg Veda.

ऋतं च सत्यं चाभीक्षात्तपसोऽध्याजायत ।  
 ततो राज्यजायत ततः समुद्रो अर्णवः ॥१॥  
 समुद्रादर्णवादधि संवत्सरो अजायत ।  
 अहोरात्राणि विदधद्विश्वस्य मिषतो वशी ॥२॥  
 सूर्याचन्द्रमसौ धाता यथा पूर्वमकल्पयत् ।  
 दिवं च पृथिवीं चान्तरिक्षमथो स्वः ॥३॥

and 'up yonder'. This makes no difference: the combination of Puruṣa and Pradhāna remains as before.

को अद्वा वेदः क इह प्रवोचत् कुत आजाता कुत इयं विसृष्टिः ।  
अवाग्देया अस्य विसर्जनेनाथा को वेद यत आबभूव । ६ ।

### GRIFFITH'S TRANSLATION

6. Who verily knows and who can here declare it,  
Whence it was born and whence comes this creation ?  
The gods are later than this world's production Who  
knows then whence it first came into being ?

1. From powerful tapas, Ṛta and Satya were born;  
then the night, then the seas.

2. From the seas was born the year. The Lord of  
the universe regulated (or arranged) days and nights.

3. The Creator made the Sun, the Moon, the Hea-  
vens, the Earth and the intermediate regions according  
to the karmas of the jīvas.

This account supplements the description given in the Nāsadiya Sūkta. Ṛta is the Divine Law, the dispensation that all things shall act in accordance with the laws appropriate to them. Satya means Truth. I have already explained the meaning to be attached to the word 'tapa' in a context like this. Ṛta and Satya can quite appositely, stand for Pradhāna and Puruṣa. Or, these two words have been used in the sense of the inherent orderliness of nature, using the word in its broadest sense, and the moral law which should guide the conduct of humanity.

It seems to me that the lines which follow give a very good description of what must have happened on the earth, millions of years ago, when it presented the

## AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION

6. Who knows, and who can say whence it came and from what it was created ? The gods are later than its creation. Who knows from where it came into being ?

## COMMENTARY

The knowledge of the Reality behind phenomena, of that from which the Universe has come forth and of the process by which it appears to us is not, as I have pointed out several times already, to be acquired merely by reasoning. It comes only through that appearance of an immensely hot ball, with a solid outer crust, surrounded by a thick gaseous envelope. The Sun, the Moon and the Stars were there but they would have been invisible to an observer on the earth, through the thick canopy of gas above. It was dark, impenetrable night. The gases would cool down and fall as rain, to be immediately flung up as vapour, by the hot crust. Astronomers are of opinion that these conditions prevail, today, upon Jupiter which, because of its size, has taken longer to pass through the stages which the earth traversed long ago. As the surface temperature cooled, however, some of the rain would remain and collect in the form of oceans. Hence the seas are said to follow the night. As more and more of the rain would be retained on the earth, the atmosphere would become more and more clear and the apparent annual motion of the Sun along the ecliptic, giving us the year, and the diurnal succession of day and night would be observed. Coming after the birth of the oceans, the Text speaks of their being born from the Seas. The last stanza explains the principle which determines the nature of the world. It is not an autocratic fiat of God: the world is such that the



purification of Buddhi which is a result of the practice of Yoga. The number of those who are interested in such problems about the ultimate reality is very small. Smaller still is the number of those who are prepared to undergo the necessary discipline. But even among those who have been able to grasp the truth for themselves, there are very, very few, indeed who are able to guide others to such knowledge. The qualifications, laid down for one who would be a teacher, are that he should be both a Śrotriya and a Brahmaniṣṭha. He who has studied these problems theoretically is a Śrotriya and he who has realized the truth through Yoga is a Brahmaniṣṭha. Only such a person can anticipate and remove doubts as well help the novice along that straight path, keen as the razor's edge, as the Upaniṣad says, which leads to self-realization. The Kāṭha Upaniṣad speaks

Jīvas may be able to earn the fruit of their previous actions and perform suitable actions for future merit and demerit. The word in the text on which this explanation hinges is yathāpūrvam, compounded of yathā (in accordance with) and apūrvam (the effect of previous actions which is to bear fruit in a succeeding life). Some commentators break up this compound into yathā and pūrvam (what has gone before). According to them, everything was created, as had been done in previous epochs of creation. This presupposes that everything blindly repeats itself from age to age, a doctrine for which there is no warrant.

I do not assert here that the Ṛṣi who sang this Sūkta had before his mind's eye those astronomical and geological conditions to which I have referred above. Every one is free to draw his own conclusions: I only wish to invite attention to this remarkable piece.

in a similar strain "Wonderful is he who can speak about it, wise is he who can attain it; verily, wonderful is he who knows it, having been taught by a wise master." Nor is such knowledge to be given to all. In the *Praśna Upaniṣad*, Pippalāda says to Kauśalya Āśval Āyana "Thou askest very abstruse questions. However, since thou art devoted to Brahma, I shall answer them."

But the gods surely possess this knowledge. The mantra says that they do not. The gods fall into two groups: there are, firstly, the *Karmadevas*, men who as a result of their good deeds attain to one or other of the higher regions and remain there for a longer or shorter period according to the merit acquired by them. They share in the enjoyments and the pleasures, but not in the powers, of the presiding deities of these regions and come back to earth, after the exhaustion of their *karmas*. In the other group are the thirty-three classes of the *Ājānadevas*, to whom I have already referred elsewhere. They are those who by their austerities in one cycle of creation become the presiding deities of the higher regions, controllers of the forces of nature, friends and guides of humanity, in another. Their knowledge is great, so is their power. Nevertheless, they are the repositories, neither of the highest power nor knowledge. They came on the stage much later. They could function only when the materials, howsoever subtle, of which their bodies are composed had been evolved, that is, after the interplay of *Puruṣa* and *Pradhāna* had begun. As the 20th Mantra of the 31st Chapter of the *Yajurveda* says, the *Virāṭ* is He who shines through the gods, who is placed before the gods, who was born before the gods. What is true of *Virāṭ* is, of course much more true of

Hiraṇyagarbha and Paramātmā. The 5th Mantra of the 16th Sūkta of the 1st maṇḍala of the Ṛg Veda says, "I, an ignorant man, ask this. Even the gods do not know it: it is hidden from them." This does not prevent any individual who has attained the position of an Ājānadeva, from acquiring this knowledge, if the desire for it should, fortunately, arise in him. The Kena Upaniṣad speaks of an Indra gaining such knowledge from Umā and the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, of another Indra serving Brahmā as a disciple.

इयं विसृष्टिर्यत आबभूव यदि वा दधे यदि वा न ।  
यो अस्याध्यक्षः परमे व्योमन्तसो अङ्ग वेद यदि वा न वेद ॥ ७ ॥

#### GRIFFITH'S TRANSLATION

7. He, the first origin of this creation,  
Whether He formed it all or did not form it,  
Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven,  
He verily knows it or, perhaps, He knows not.

#### AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION

7. From what this creation arose, who created it and who did not; its master who dwells in the highest region of the sky, He knows all this or, perhaps, He too does not know.

#### COMMENTARY

This Mantra is an amplification of the preceding one. The intention is not to indicate that God's knowledge is subject to any kind of limitation—as the Yoga Darśana of Patanjali says, He is the teacher of all the teachers who have gone before, being beyond the limitation of time—but to give an idea of the difficult nature of the subject. To say that God dwells in the highest region



of the sky or in highest heaven is not to assign any spatial habitation to Him. The name given to that sky is Cidākāśa, sky of consciousness, supreme knowledge, all-pervasive, all embracing, like space. This is, of course, an attempt to put an elusive idea, elusive because of its transcendent nature, into words and just as much of a success as any such attempt can hope to be. The word in the text which has been translated as master, because this is its customary usage, is adhyakṣa. Literally, it means 'above the eyes'. Taking 'eye' to be a generic term for all instruments of knowledge, that which is above the eyes would be above, i.e. beyond, the reach of the instruments of knowledge. In this sense, the expression stands for Brahma. Now Brahma is pure consciousness and the Universe as universe does not exist in It. Therefore, it can quite pertinently be said of Brahma that It does not know anything about creation. It may be that, in this way, in this last verse, attention has been sought to be concentrated on Brahma. Liberation from the toils of Māyā consists in the realization that I am Brahma. In that state, there is neither Creation, nor Creator, neither Subject nor Object, neither God nor Jīva.

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